



Rs 8.00

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

ISSN 0032-6178



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December 2008
Bridging Social Divides

Vol. 113, No. 12

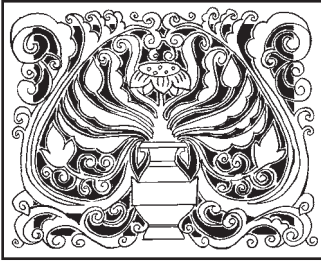


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Amrita Kalasha

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INTERNET EDITION AT:

www.advaitaashrama.org

PB December 2008

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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

Transcending Distinctions

December 2008
Vol. 113, No. 12

यथेमां वाचं कल्याणीमावदानि जनेभ्यः ।

ब्रह्मराजन्याभ्यां शूद्राय चार्याय च स्वाय चारणाय च ॥

So may I speak these blessed words to the people at large—to the brahmana and the kshatriya, to the vaishya and the shudra, to my own people and to the foreigner. (Yajur Veda, 26.2)

रुचं नो धेहि ब्राह्मणेषु रुचं राजसु नस्कृधि ।

रुचं विश्वेषु शूद्रेषु मयि धेहि रुचा रुचम् ॥

Grant lustre—glory—to our brahmanas, grant it to our kings; grant glory to our vaishyas and shudras, grant glory to me through your lustre. (18.48)

चण्डालदेहे पश्वादिशरीरे ब्रह्मविग्रहे ।

अन्येषु तारतम्येन स्थितेषु पुरुषोत्तम ।

व्योमवत्सर्वदा व्याप्तः सर्वसंबन्धवर्जितः ॥

एकरूपो महादेवः स्थितः सोऽहं परामृतः ।

इति यो वेद वेदान्तेः सोऽतिवर्णाश्रमी भवेत् ॥

One who knows through Vedanta, O Purushottama, that Mahadeva, who is one, devoid of all relations, ever pervasive like space though residing in different beings—in the Chandala body, the animal form, the frame of a brahmana, or in other beings, high and low—as ‘I am He, the supreme immortal Being’, transcends the system of varna and ashrama. (Suta Samhita, 5.25-7)

जातिनीतिकुलगोत्रदूरगं नामरूपगुणदोषवर्जितम् ।

देशकालविषयातिवर्ति यद् ब्रह्म तत्त्वमसि भावयात्मनि ॥

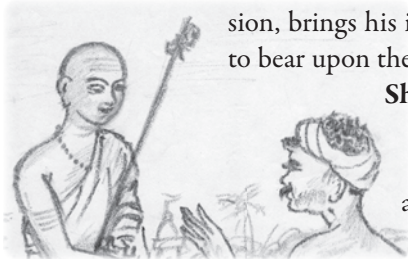
That which is beyond caste and creed, family and lineage; devoid of name and form, merit and demerit; transcending space, time, and sense-objects—that Brahman art thou; meditate on this in thy mind.

(Vivekachudamani, 254)

THIS MONTH

In Swami Vivekananda's words, India is a 'veritable ethnological museum'. While ordering this ocean of humanity derived from various ethnic groups—'seething, boiling, struggling, constantly changing form'—had been the chief concern of lawmakers in ancient and medieval India, bridging social divides and **Building an Equitable Society** engages our attention today. This also is our focus for the month.

Swami Ranganathanandaji, the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, brings his illuminative insights to bear upon the encounter between



Shankaracharya and an Untouchable as depicted by the acharya in *Manisha Panchakam*.

In **Beyond Distinctions**, Swami Narasimhanandaji, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, analyses the patterns of segregation that have emerged from natural human differences and points to the Vedantic way of transcending them.

Sri A P N Pankaj, an eminent littérateur from Chandigarh, begins his study of the problem of **Bridging Social Divides: The Indian Way** with a look into the origins of the varna system and caste and their attendant divisions, handicaps, and privileges.

In **Brahmana: The Dynamics of Interpretation**, Dr Saurav Basu examines representative Indian texts of several genres spanning a couple of millennia to suggest that the *brahmanatva* ideal—marked by the realization of Brahman—was always looked upon by both the orthodox and heterodox traditions as a mark of individual as well as social perfection. The author is pursuing postgraduate studies in medicine at New Delhi.

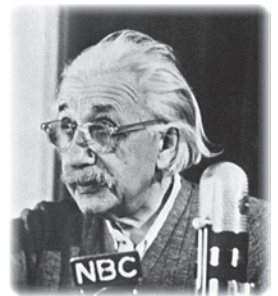
Shruba Mukherjee, a senior journalist based in New Delhi, reflects on her experiences about South African society obtained from her recent visit to that country. The persistent gulf between various communities, a former freedom fighter informs her, is nothing but '**Apartheid in Another Form**'.

The differences in the spiritual goals set before us by the spiritual masters of various traditions are reconciled in **The Ultimate Goal of Life**, says Swami Brahmeshanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh, even as he invites us to test this for ourselves.

In the fourth instalment of **Narada Bhakti Sutra**, Swami Bhaskareswaranandaji, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, discusses the means for the attainment of bhakti and the reason why bhakti is its own reward.

Spiritual sadhana is a process of de-hypnotization, says Swami Sarvagatanandaji, Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston, in **Light on Patanjali – V**. He also discusses the place of Ishwara and bhakti in raja yoga.

Swami Tathagatanandaji, Vedanta Society, New York, sketches a portrait of **Albert Einstein: A Humane Scientist**, highlighting his simplicity, idealism, magnanimity, concern for others, and passionate espousal of peace.



Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, continues his research on Girishchandra Ghosh, examining the relationship between **Girish and the Monastic Disciples of Ramakrishna**.

EDITORIAL

Building an Equitable Society

Engage four brahmanas, eight kshatriyas, twenty one vaishyas, three shudras, and one Suta as your cabinet members. The brahmanas should be learned, articulate, pure, and should have completed their graduation; the kshatriyas strong and armed; the vaishyas well-to-do; the shudras well-trained, their honesty having been borne out by past deeds; and the Suta accomplished in the Puranas and possessing the eight cardinal virtues. All of them must be in their fifties, articulate, educated in the Vedas and the legal system—Shruti and Smriti—humble, able to resolve discord between people, and unaffected by greed and malice.

—Mahabharata, 12.85.7–10.

BHISHMA'S advice to Yudhishtira about the composition of his cabinet, cited above, may come as a surprise to many of us who believe that caste-based reservation of jobs in India is a modern phenomenon. The composition of Bhishma's ministry, in fact, has an uncanny resemblance to that of many present-day state governments in India. Though the moneyed classes seem to have had a major say in the power equations in Bhishma's time, as they do even now, the near equal representation of brahmanas and shudras as the king's counsel is of especial interest at a time when much acrimony is being generated in Indian society over the shifting power equation of these groups.

The famous Lingayat leader Basava observed:

Vyasa is a fisherman's son,
Markandeya of an outcaste born
Mandodari, the daughter of a frog! ...
Indeed, Agastya was a fowler; Durvasa,
a maker of shoes; Kashyapa a blacksmith. ...
Mark ye all the words of our Kudala Sangama
What matters if one is lowly born?
Only a Shivabhakta is well born.

Basava's *vachana* suggests that caste-based discrimination had crystallized by the twelfth century. The composition also tries to remind us that individual merit seems to have been an important determiner of social position in the epic and Puranic times. In fact, individuals have always managed to rise above external limitations in all societies. K P Jayaswal observes that the Nanda Empire, the first real Indian empire in the modern sense of the term, was founded by Mahapadma Nanda who was born a shudra. The Mauryas, who succeeded the Nandas, were also 'shudras on the unanimous testimony of the Purana historians and the evidence of Sanskrit literature'. The Guptas, who established the third great Hindu empire that flourished from the third to the sixth centuries CE, were also of the lowly Karkara caste.

While individuals, families, and even select caste groups managed to outgrow the caste-based limitations imposed on them by society, such upward mobility failed to defuse the inequities of the caste system. Bhimrao Ambedkar believed that caste distinctions were intractable because they were 'graded inequalities'. 'In the system of graded inequality,' he observed, 'there is no such class as completely unprivileged class [*sic*] except the one which is at the base of the social pyramid. The privileges of the rest are graded. Even the low is a privileged class as compared with the lower. Each class being privileged, every class is interested in maintaining the system.'

The programme of 'compensatory discrimination' undertaken by various governments in India over the last hundred years has not only increased the social and political awareness of the lower castes, it has also encouraged cooperation among the castes through formation of 'interest groups'.


In the process, however, it has only managed to strengthen caste identities.

Kaka Kalelkar, who chaired the first Backward Classes Commission—constituted in 1953 to identify the socially and educationally backward classes and propose steps to improve their condition—had recorded a note of dissent on the caste-based quotas suggested by the commission. He wrote: ‘The nation has decided to establish a classless and casteless society, which also demands that backwardness should be studied from the point of view of the individual and, at the most, that of the family’. Besides, like other dissenters, ‘he feared that caste-based quotas would foster “communalism and casteism [which] are bound to destroy the unity of the nation and narrow down the aspirations of the people”. Last but not least, Kalelkar made a plea in favour of reservation based on economic criteria which would enable the government “to remove the bitterness which the extremely poor and helpless amongst the upper class [*sic*] Hindus feel that they are victimised for no fault of their own”’.

The socialist Ram Manohar Lohia disagreed: ‘Many socialists honestly but wrongly think that it is sufficient to strive for economic inequality and caste inequality will vanish of itself as a consequence. They fail to comprehend economic inequality and caste inequality as twin demons, which have both to be killed.’ He pointed out why merit alone could not foster egalitarianism in a society where inequalities have been deeply entrenched: ‘The intelligentsia of India which is overwhelmingly the high-caste, abhors all talk of a mental and social revolution, of a radical change in respect of language or caste, so long as it can be allowed to be equally vociferous in raising the banner of merit and equal opportunity. What it loses in respect of caste by birth, it gains in respect of caste by merit. Its merit concerning speech, grammar, manners, capacity to adjust, routine efficiency is undisputed. Five thousand years have gone into the building of this undisputed merit.’

In *Social Movements and Social Transformation*, M S A Rao has identified five distinct ways in which

the lower castes have tried to improve their lot: ‘The first is categorized by “withdrawal and self-organisation”. It is epitomized by the Ezhavas movement in Kerala which has many common features with the traditional bhakti way of contesting caste by resorting to sectarian arrangements (a Guru leads his group out of society to promote its self-esteem). The second one, illustrated by the Yadavs, is based on the claim of “higher *varna* status” and fits with the Sanskritization pattern. The third one extols “the virtues of the non-Aryan [Dravidian] culture”. It took shape in South India and in Maharashtra to a lesser extent. The fourth one negates Hinduism by embracing Buddhism—like the Ambedkar movement. The last one relies on Marxist ideology.’ Rao observes that but for the last ‘the religious element forms an essential part of protest ideology’.

Swami Vivekananda offers important insights on each of these processes. When Dr Palpu, an Ezhava, had complained to him of the tyranny of the higher castes over the low-caste people in Kerala, he said to Dr Palpu: ‘Why do you go after the Brahmins? Find out some good noble person from among your own people and follow him.’ Dr Palpu discovered such a person in Narayana Guru, the leader of the Ezhava movement, and devoted much of his time and money to the welfare of his community. Vivekananda told the lower caste populace: ‘The only way to bring about the levelling of caste is to appropriate the culture, the education, which is the strength of the higher castes. That done you have what you want.’ He took great pride in the ethnic identities of Indian subgroups: ‘We are proud of our Sanskrit-speaking ancestors of the Vedas; proud of our Tamil-speaking ancestors whose civilization is the oldest yet known; we are proud of our Kolarian ancestors older than either of the above—who lived and hunted in forests.’ To him ‘Buddhism is nothing but “a rebel child” of Hinduism’ and he identified himself both as a Buddhist and a socialist. But the breadth of the swami’s sympathies was based on the Vedantic idea of human divinity. Actualizing this idea in society was the swami’s avowed mission. In it lies the sure basis of an egalitarian society. 

Shankaracharya and an Untouchable

Swami Ranganathananda

I HAVE been greatly fascinated by a very popular composition of Shankaracharya's, known as *Manisha Panchakam*, 'five verses on wisdom'. *Maniṣā* means wisdom or conviction. This stotra was born of an incident in Shankara's life. I shall share with you this beautiful composition and refer to the problem of untouchability, which has been dogging Indian society for hundreds of years and which we are trying to end once and for all in the modern period. In no other country is this type of untouchability practised by one human being against another, only in India. And the tragedy is that we have the highest philosophy of unity of all existence—the philosophy of Advaita, non-duality. Such high philosophy, but never put into practice. All sorts of narrow ideas came to us in our social life. Separatism between groups; high caste and low caste; and along with that, this curse of untouchability and something more: 'un-approachability', 'un-seeability' also. These are the evils that afflicted our society for nearly two thousand years. Beginning with very beautiful ideas about organizing society into groups, the whole system became cluttered and absolutely stagnant, with tremendous injustice involved in it—the evils of untouchability, caste pride, and caste superiority.

Shankara Encounters an Untouchable

Here is an incident from the life of Shankaracharya. That was about twelve hundred years ago. After he had completed his studies under his guru Govindapada on the banks of the Narmada, this young man, hardly sixteen, was commanded by his guru to go

to Banaras—Kashi, a great centre of learning for hundreds of years—establish the purity and greatness of the Vedanta philosophy, and then travel around India and preach the profound message of Advaita, the great contribution of the Upanishads: '*Ekam-evādvitīyam brahma*'; Brahman is one only, and not two.' The whole universe—with all beings within it—is an expression of that one Brahman. That means: we are all one. Separatist ideas are due to ignorance. That is the great teaching of the Upanishads. The profoundest ideas that were ever promulgated by the human mind—they are the Upanishads. To establish the authority of the Upanishads in India so that Indian life may be elevated, Shankara went to Banaras. But while he was living in Banaras one event took place, which demands our attention.

This story is narrated in the biographies of Shankaracharya. There are several of them, but the most important is *Shankara Digvijaya* by Madhava Vidyaranya, who had helped in the founding of the Vijayanagara Empire and had served as minister to the two brothers Harihar and Bukka, the kings at that time. Later on, he became the guru at the Sringeri Math. His brother Sayana was a great commentator on the Vedas. *Shankara Digvijaya* contains Vidyaranya's narration. There is no real historical writing on Shankara's life. Already five centuries had passed before Vidyaranya came on the scene. So a lot of mythology, miracles, and such things are mixed up with the main story. But the broad tenor of his life can be seen through the narrative. It is a masterly narration. This particular scene has been very well described. A little bit of mythology has been introduced, which, to my mind, spoils the humanistic beauty of the whole episode. That I shall refer to when we deal with the episode itself.

This is an edited transcript of a lecture delivered by Swami Ranganathananda at Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, on 15 November 1992.

In his narration of Shankara's life, Vidyaranya begins this episode with the following statement: 'On one such [summer] noon, the great Acharya, desirous of doing his midday rites, walked with his disciples to the Ganga, whose surface looked discoloured by the pollen of lotus flowers.' On the way, he met a *caṇḍāla*, an untouchable, on the roadside. This untouchability had gone so deep into the bones of the people of India that even a man of wisdom—of Advaitic realization—became subject to it. That is the story you get here. It only shows that this particular evil has gone so deep inside that it will take quite a long struggle to completely eradicate it from the human mind in India. That is what we are doing in the modern period, and that is why this episode is of great significance to us. Introducing the story, the text says:

*Satyācāryasya gamane
kadācinmukti-dāyakam;
kāśī-kṣetram prati saha gauryā
marge tu śaṅkaram.
Antyaveśadharam dṛṣṭvā
gaccha gaccheti cābravīt;
śaṅkaraḥ so'pi caṇḍālas-
taṁ punaḥ prāha śaṅkaram.*

Once upon a time, when the great acharya [Shankaracharya] was on his way to the holy salvation-offering Kashi, he saw on the road Shiva with his consort Gouri in the guise of *caṇḍālas*, and said, 'Get away, get away!' The Chandala Shankara [Shiva] in turn spoke to [Acharya] Shankara.

A myth is introduced here—that Shiva and Parvati met Shankara on the roadside in the form of untouchables. That is how the storyteller puts it. Why? Because we cannot imagine that a Shankara can undo untouchability. Because it is so much part and parcel of our thinking that though Shankara did meet an untouchable, the latter could not possibly have been an untouchable. He must have been Shiva in some form. That is the thinking. This is mythologizing a human story. Take away the myth. The human story is most inspiring. So I am putting it to you from that point of view. What does Shankara say? 'Gaccha, gaccha, iti ca abravīt; Get away,

get away! he said.' That is what you tell the untouchable. Get away from the road. I have to pass by. Shankara told this to the untouchables. Here it is a couple. Shiva and Gauri, as the author puts it. Or, as we would say today, the untouchable and his wife, who were on the road. And we say: Get away, get away!

It is so common in our society. Fifty years ago, in Kerala, I have seen that 'get away, get away; gaccha, gaccha' was a constant utterance of high-class people going on the road. They were always afraid that some untouchable might be lurking here or there. The madness that we had at that time you cannot imagine today, because a good deal of that we have overcome. But here you see this happening twelve hundred years ago in the holy city of Kashi.

'Śaṅkaraḥ so'pi caṇḍālastaṁ punaḥ prāha śaṅkaram; the Chandala, who was also Shiva himself, told Shankara the following.' If you remove the word Shiva, the Chandala—the outcaste—told the following to Shankaracharya. What did the Chandala say? The Chandala told Shankaracharya his own Vedanta; Shankara's own Vedanta the Chandala also knew. All over India you can see that ordinary low caste people can speak Vedanta, for they hear various expositions by speakers. They also gather a lot of this through songs and similar means. So it was not something unusual that an untouchable could speak Vedanta. What kind of Vedanta did he speak? He spoke Shankara's own Vedanta to him. What did he say?

The Chandala Speaks

*Annamayād-annamayam hyathavā
caitanyam-eva-caitanyāt;
Dvijavara dūrikartum vāñchasi kim
brūhi gaccha gaccheti.*

O worthy brahmana, please let me know what exactly you wish to keep away. Is it the physical body from another body, or consciousness from another consciousness?

Dvijavara, O great brahmana, *dūrikartum vāñchasi*, you want it to go far away. Why do you say 'get away, get away'? I want to know. Do you

refer to this body—this *annamaya* body, the body made of food? *Annamaya kośa* is the body. You want that this *annamaya kośa* should get away from your *annamaya kośa*. Do you mean that? *Annamayād annamayam*? Or, *caitanya* *eva caitanyāt*? There is *caitanya*, Consciousness, in me; and *caitanya* in you. Do you want to see this *caitanya* get away from your *caitanya*? I want to know what exactly you mean. That is number one. The second shloka contains some more Vedanta:

Kiṁ gaṅgāmbuni bimbite'mbara-maṇau
caṇḍāla-vāṭi-payāḥ
pūre cāntaram-asti kāñcana-ghaṭi-mṛt-
kumbhayor-vāmbare;
Pratyag-vastuni nistarāṅga-sahajānandāva-
bodhāmbudhau
vipro'yaṁ śvapaco'yaṁ-ityapi mahān
ko'yaṁ vibheda-bhramah.

Is there any difference between the reflection of the sun in the waters of the Ganga and that in the water flowing by the *caṇḍāla*'s hut; or between the space within a golden jar and that within a clay pot? Wherefrom has arisen this great delusion, which sees one as a brahmana and another as a *caṇḍāla*, in this inner Self—this one waveless ocean of self-existing bliss and consciousness?

The Chandala is asking: 'Ko'yaṁ vibheda-bhramah; wherefrom this delusion of separateness in your mind?' *Vibheda* means distinction, separateness; *bhrama*, delusion; wherefrom has it come? Then he cites two examples: The sun is reflected in the waters of the Ganga, *gaṅgāmbuni bimbite ambara-maṇau*, and in the little streak of water by the house of the *caṇḍāla*, *caṇḍāla-vāṭi-payāḥ*. Does it make a difference to the sun? Reflecting in the Ganga water, or reflecting in this dirty water—does it make any difference to the sun? Or, 'pūre cāntaram-asti kāñcana-ghaṭi-mṛt-kumbhayor-vāmbare; is there any difference where space or *ākāśa* exists—in a golden vessel or in an ordinary mud vessel?' Is there any difference between these two, so far as space is concerned? That is the second example. He says further: In that infinite ocean, *ambudhau*—calm, silent ocean of in-

finite bliss, *nistarāṅga-sahajānanda*—in that ocean which is your own infinite Self, *pratyag-vastuni*, this man is a brahmana, *vipro'yaṁ*, this man is an eater of dogs or a *caṇḍāla*, *śvapaco'yaṁ*—how can these distinctions come unless there is tremendous delusion, *mahān ko'yaṁ vibheda-bhramah*? *Pratyak* means 'within yourself', your infinite Self. *Parāk* means outside, the world outside. *Pratyag-vastu* or *pratyagātman* is the inner Self, which is one in all of us according to Advaita. So this delusion is not ordinary delusion. It is a very great delusion, *mahān bhramah*? Wherefrom has it come?

That was the question put by the Chandala to Shankaracharya. We can take it that any *caṇḍāla* can ask this question. We have seen many low caste people speaking this high philosophy. But this Chandala has the courage to put it in a nice way in Banaras. Now comes Shankara's reaction. He thought for a moment and in his heart of hearts he said, 'This man has taught me Vedanta correctly.' That is how Shankara reacted to this questioning by the Chandala; and that is put in the five verses of *Manisha Panchakam*.

Shankara's Response

Jāgrat-svapna-sūptiṣu sphuṭatarā
yā saṁvidujjrmabhate
yā brahmādi-pipilikānta-tanuṣu
protā jagat-sākṣiṇī;
Saivāhaṁ na ca dṛśya-vastviti dṛḍha-prajñā-
asti yasyāpi cec-
caṇḍālo'stu sa tu dvijo'stu gurur-
ityeṣā maṇiṣā mama.

That Consciousness which shines forth most distinctly in waking, dream, and deep sleep; that which is the one Witness of the universe that threads all bodies ranging from Brahma's down to the ant's; that I am, and not anything phenomenal—whoever possesses this firm wisdom is my guru, be he a *caṇḍāla* or a person twice-born. This is my conviction.

The last line is beautiful. Let him be a *caṇḍāla*, let him be a brahmana—*caṇḍālo'stu sa tu dvijo'stu*—whoever has realized this truth, he is my guru.

Dvija means 'twice-born' or 'brahmana'. After the holy thread is given, a child is considered to be born anew. That is a *dvija*.

Gururityeṣā manīṣā mama—this is my firm conviction, that such a person, who has realized the truth, is my guru. What kind of truth? That *saṁvid*, pure Knowledge or pure Consciousness, that reveals itself clearly in all the three states—waking, dream, and deep sleep—*jāgrat-svapna-suṣuptiṣu sphutatarā*, that I am, *saivāham*. This is the great theme of the *Mandukya Upanishad* and the 'Kārika' on this Upanishad by Gaudapada, the guru of Shankara's guru, Govindapada.

Then there is the Witness of the whole universe. All the activities going on in the world are witnessed by the pure Consciousness. That Consciousness is present in the bodies of all beings, from Brahma to the ant below, *brahmādi-pipilikānta-tanuṣu*. Brahma's body and the little *pipilikā*'s body—that infinite Consciousness, which is the Witness of the universe, is present in each body. '*Saivāham*; I am that.' This knowledge must come. '*Na ca dṛśya-vastu*; (I am) not the objects that are seen by the senses.' I am the subject. I am the Self. I am the Consciousness. I am not an object. This knowledge must come. That is the great teaching of Vedānta. You are essentially a subject; not an object. Objects of the world are there. Rocks and stones, all these are objects. But I am not an object. I am the subject. In Vedānta we call it *viśayī*, the Subject, the Seer, the Knower, the Self; *viśaya* means 'object'. I am not a *dṛśya-vastu*, a thing seen by the five senses. Whoever has this *dṛḍha-prajñā*, firm wisdom—be that a *caṇḍāla*, be that a brahmana—he is my guru. I salute him. That is the first verse by Shankara-charya. The second one reads thus:

*Brahmaivāham-idaṁ jagacca sakalam
cinmātra-vistāritam
sarvaṁ caitat-avidyayā triguṇayā-
aśeṣaṁ mayā kalpitam;
Itthaṁ yasya dṛḍhā matiḥ sukhatare
nitye pare nirmale
caṇḍālo'stu sa tu dvijo'stu gurur-
ityeṣā manīṣā mama.*

I and this whole universe are but Brahman, a manifestation of pure Consciousness; all these phenomena have been imagined by me through ignorance comprising the three *gunas*. He whose mind is thus firmly rooted in the supremely blissful, eternal, pure, transcendental Reality is my guru, be he a *caṇḍāla* or a person twice-born. This is my conviction.

The last line is the same: Let him be a *caṇḍāla*, let him be a brahmana, I do not care; he or she is my guru who realizes this truth. What is that? *Brahmaivāham*, I am Brahman; *idaṁ jagacca*, and all this universe also is Brahman. The *Mundaka Upanishad* says: '*Brahmaivedaṁ viśvam-idaṁ variṣṭham*; the whole universe is that very worshipful Brahman.' That is the Vedāntic teaching. The entire universe is nothing but Brahman. '*Cinmātra-vistāritam*; (it is) the expansion of pure Consciousness.' Pure Consciousness expanded as the universe. All the things that you see as 'not Brahman' are merely your *kalpanā*, your imagination, through the power of *maya*, through ignorance, *avidyayā*. You imagine that this is something separate, though it is all Brahman, all the time. '*Avidyayā triguṇayā*; by the threefold *avidyā*', meaning thereby the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*; their play makes for the differentiation in the one non-dual Brahman.

Itthaṁ yasya dṛḍhā matiḥ, he or she who has this firm conviction—a mind settled in that Brahman which is *sukhatara*, supremely blissful, *nitya*, eternal, *para*, the highest, and *nirmala*, pure—is my guru. Then:

*Śaśvannaśvaram-eva viśvam-akhilam
niścītya vācā guror-
nityam brahma nirantaram vimṣatā
nirvyāja-śāntātmanā;
Bhūtaṁ bhāvi ca duṣkṛtaṁ pradahatā
saṁvinmaye pāvake
prārābhdhāya samarpitaṁ sva-vapur-
ityeṣā manīṣā mama.*

One who having realized, through the instructions of the guru, the utter unreality of the whole universe, engages oneself in the contemplation of the eternal Brahman with an honest calm mind,

and burns up all sins, past and future, in the fire of Consciousness—(such a person) has submitted the body to *prārabdha karma*. This is my conviction.

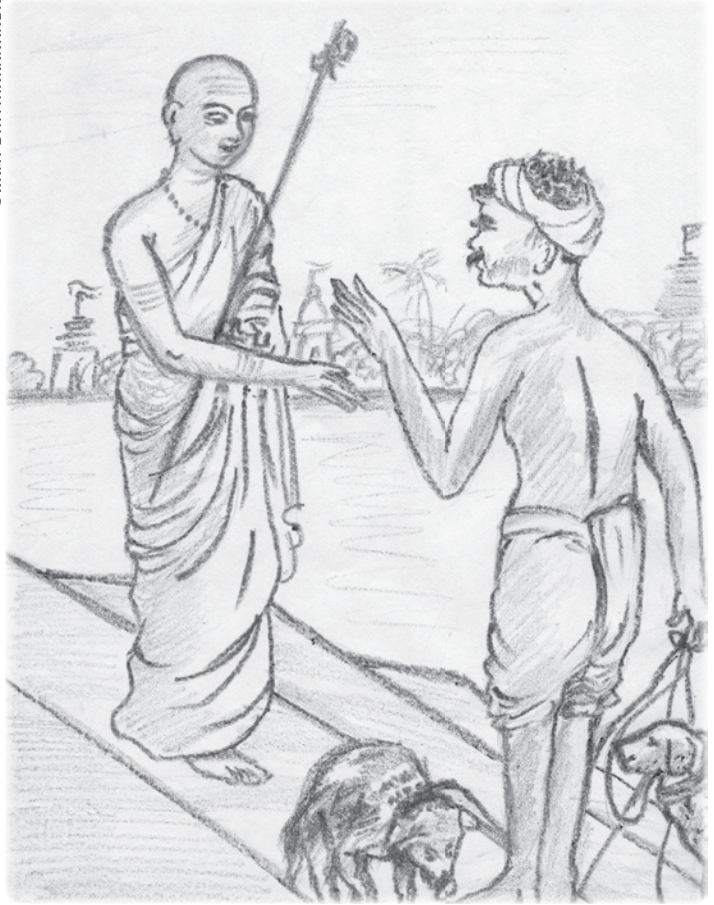
This is my firm wisdom or conviction. What is that? ‘*Śaśvannaśvaram-eva viśvam-akhilam*; the entire universe is constantly getting destroyed.’ Nothing is stationary. The whole universe is *naśvara*, destructible. Day after day you can see: everything is born, and dies. This conviction comes to you from the words of the guru, *vācā guroḥ*.

What is *nitya*, permanent? Brahman. Brahman is eternal, without a break in it. Thinking of this continuously, *nirantara*, with a pure and calm mind, *nirvyāja-śāntātmanā*—a mind that is open, free, without any tricks—and burning all past and future bad doings, bad karma, *duṣkṛtam*, in the fire of pure Consciousness, *samvinmaye pāvake*, one’s body is given over to *prārabdha*—*prārabdhāya samarpitam sva-vapuḥ*. It continues till *prārabdha* is worked out.

Karma has three divisions: *prārabdha*, *sañcita*, and *āgāmī*. Those samasakaras that are now functioning are called *prārabdha*; those that are stored just below the surface mind, in the subconscious, are termed *sañcita*. The third type is deep inside; it will take ages to manifest. All these types of impressions are there. Only the *prārabdha* is actually working now. A man has one eye. It is his *prārabdha*. He cannot change it. We have got our bodies. They are there. We have to live with them. So I live with a body through the action of *prārabdha*. Let it go. The other two we burn away completely through the fire of *samvid*, pure Consciousness.

Prārabdhāya samarpitam sva-vapuḥ: One’s body is already functioning, the results of our past actions *karma-phala* are already seen in the body. We offer it

SWAMI BHITHARANANDA



to *prārabdha*. Let it work itself out in whatever way it can. This Swami Vivekananda said in his ‘Song of the Sannyasin’, composed at the Thousand Island Park in America. Let someone put a garland on this body, let others spit on it—it does not make any difference to me. I am not the body. The body is part of that *prārabdha* that is being worked out in this way.

The next shloka:

*Yā tiryāṇī-naradevatābhir-aham-
ityantaḥ sphuṭā gṛhyate
yadbhāsā hrdayākṣadehaviṣayā
bhānti svatōcetanāḥ;
Tām bhāsyaiḥ pihitārkaṇḍalanibhām
sphūrtim sadā bhāvayan
yogī nirvṛtamānaso hi gurur-
ityeṣā maṇiṣā mama.*

The yogi whose mind is tranquil due to constant contemplation on the effulgence of the pure

Consciousness existing in lower animals, humans, and gods as the 'I' within; by whose lustre shine forth the mind the senses, the body, and the objects of the senses, all void of consciousness in themselves; and which, like the sun, is covered by the very objects that it illumine—such a person is my guru. This is my conviction.

That yogi whose mind is perfectly at peace with itself—*nirvṛtamānasa*—is my guru. That is my firm conviction. What kind of development has he achieved? The yogi enjoys inner tranquillity of mind as he constantly contemplates the glistening pure Consciousness which is directly intuited as 'I, I, I ...'. The real 'I' is that infinite *saṁvid*. What we ordinarily know as our 'I' is limited by the genetic system. But so far as this yogi is concerned, he realizes the 'I' as the pure Consciousness that exists within lower animals, men, and gods, *tiryāṇī-naradevatābhir-aham-ityantaḥ*. This 'I' exists in all of them.

The Consciousness through whose lustre alone shine the mind, the senses, and the body; that makes the sense organs, the mind, and the body alive, vital, with a sense of life in them—that Consciousness is behind all these. The body has no consciousness. The sense organs have no consciousness. The mind has no consciousness. It is the Consciousness behind all of them that is called *saṁvid*. That gives consciousness to all these various organs of the human system. Consciousness is like the orb of the sun. It is beclouded by the very objects which it illuminates. A cloud comes, it covers the sun; the sun illumines even that cloud. And the cloud is the product of the sun. Similarly, these senses, mind, and body are all products of the pure Consciousness, and they hide that Consciousness within us. That is what is happening in our everyday life. The one who knows this truth of that *saṁvid* which does all this, that person is my guru, says Shankara in verse four. This is my conception of a guru.

And next, the final verse:

*Yat-soukhyāmbudhi-leśa-leśata
ime śakrādayo nirvṛtā*

*yaccitte nitarām praśānta-kalane
labdhvā munir-nirvṛtaḥ;
Yasmin-nitya-sukhāmbudhau galita-dhīr-
brahmaiva na brahmavid-
yaḥ kaścīt-sa surendra-vandita-pado
nūnam mañiṣā mama.*

He whose mind is merged in that eternal ocean of Bliss—even the smallest part of a drop of which satisfies Indra and others, realizing which, through a totally unagitated mind, a sage becomes happy—such a person is himself Brahman and not (a mere) knower of Brahman. He is a worthy soul at whose feet the best of the gods bow down. This is my conviction.

From that ocean of pure Happiness or Bliss—Brahman is described here as an ocean of Bliss, *soukhyāmbudhi*—an extremely small trickle, *leśa-leśa*, of that pure Consciousness satisfies the gods like Indra, *śakrādayo nirvṛtā*. Just a trickle! They are full of happiness because of that. They are fully satisfied with a drop of that ocean of Consciousness which is Brahman.

Sages who meditate also realize this wonderful truth of that infinite ocean of pure Consciousness when the mind is perfectly calm, *citte nitarām praśānta-kalane*. And, gaining this realization, the sages become fully satisfied, completely fulfilled in life, *labdhvā munir-nirvṛtaḥ*. He whose mind is merged, *galita dhīḥ*, in that eternal ocean of bliss, *nitya-sukhāmbudhau*, such a person is himself Brahman, *brahmaiva*; he is not a mere knower of Brahman, *na brahmavid*. Whoever has realized his identity with this Brahman is really a worthy soul at whose feet the best of the gods bow down, *surendra-vandita-pado*. This is my firm conviction. This is my wisdom.

These are the five verses of Shankara, in reply to the two of the Chandala, which comprise the *Manisha Panchakam*. It is interesting that a man like Shankaracharya, an Advaitin, who knew that everything is Brahman, even he was affected for a minute by this curse of untouchability. How powerful this influence is on the human mind in India. The modern period of Indian history is espe-

cially significant in that this particular evil is now being wiped away completely from Indian society. It has been dogging us for centuries together. Millions of people have been treated worse than animals, and today we have two great teachers who came and taught us to practise this Advaita, not merely talk about it. They were Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

The Examples of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda

In Sri Ramakrishna's life there is a wonderful episode which is inspiring for all of us in this modern period. During his twelve years of spiritual practice at the Dakshineswar temple, just like a scientist busy in his own laboratory—and Sri Ramakrishna was a scientist in the field of religion—he conducted many experiments. One such experiment is unique from the point of view and the context in which we are discussing the subject of untouchability. He got up one midnight, went to the house of a *caṇḍāla*, and washed his latrine.* If he had done it by daytime, the latter would not have allowed it. The *caṇḍāla* knows that he is an untouchable. This is what has happened in India. The upper classes knew they were superior. The lower classes knew they were inferior; they were born inferior; they had to remain inferior. This idea had just been pressed down into the minds of the people—both of them, the upper and the lower castes. That is India. Now this is going to be broken in this modern period.

Here we have the sadhana of Sri Ramakrishna. He was washing and cleaning the latrine at midnight because the untouchable ought not to know; otherwise he would object. While cleaning, he was praying to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother! Make me the servant of the pariah, make me feel that I am even lower than the pariah.' That is a wonderful

prayer. Make me the servant of all. What a beautiful idea!

There are interesting sidelights on this question. There are orthodox *maṭhādhīpatīs*—heads of monasteries—in India who believe in untouchability. They find it very natural. Anything against it they cannot imagine. Let me tell what happened about seventy years ago. A university registrar went to a *maṭhādhīpati* and, in the course of a talk, told him about Sri Ramakrishna and the local Ramakrishna Ashrama. He referred to this sadhana of Sri Ramakrishna—that he went and washed the latrine of an untouchable. As soon as the *maṭhādhīpati* heard this statement, he could not bear to hear anything more. 'Stop, Stop. Don't tell it. Don't tell it.' The gentleman said, 'But he did it.' 'Even if he had done it, don't tell it to others. Don't tell it to others. It is degrading to the brahmana,' said the *maṭhādhīpati*. The gentleman replied, 'I find it to be the greatest act for a brahmana.' But they could not come to a common understanding. The registrar's was a modern mind. The other was the old traditional mind.

Let us come to Swami Vivekananda's life. Right from boyhood he was a rebel against these distinctions between human beings. His father, Vishwanath Datta, was an attorney at the Calcutta High Court. His house had a visitors' room with various types of hookahs—Hindu hookah, Muslim hookah, Christian hookah. One day young Narendra—that was Vivekananda's pre-monastic name—entered the room and found these different hookahs. Why so many different hookahs? Is not one hookah enough? Why cannot a Hindu smoke from other hookahs? I do not accept all these distinctions. Let me try. He started to smoke from one hookah, then turned over to the Christian hookah, then the Muslim hookah, and looked around to see if the walls were falling down. Nothing happened. 'The whole thing is a superstition,' he told himself. At that moment his father entered the room. 'Boy! What are you doing?' he asked. 'I am trying to find out the distinction between this hookah and that hookah. Why do you make all these different hookahs for different communities?

* According to Swami Vivekananda: 'He would enter the house. He had long hair, and with that hair he would wipe the place.' See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.175.

I can't understand this,' Narendra replied. 'What a boy you are! A rebellious boy!' the father exclaimed, and left the room.

This incident is from the early period of Narendra's life. Later, when he was going round India as an itinerant monk, a *parivrājaka*, another incident took place. He was somewhere between Agra and Vrindaban, travelling on foot. After a long walk he felt tired. He found a man smoking a hookah in a corner of a village. He approached him: 'Can you give me a smoke to refresh myself? I have to walk a long distance.' 'You are a sadhu,' the man replied, 'and I am an untouchable. How can you ask this of me?' As soon as he heard this, as any Hindu with that entrenched consciousness of untouchability within him would, Swamiji moved aside and started walking. Suddenly a thought occurred to him: 'What! I made this distinction. I teach Vedanta. I teach oneness. Yet I made this distinction!' He returned to the person, who was still sitting and smoking. 'Give your hookah to me. I shall smoke.' He took the hookah, smoked well, blessed the man, and went away.

When he was at the court of the raja of Khetri, the latter invited him one night to a musical programme by a nautch girl. This is the second group whom we have suppressed in India: the Indian women. We have looked down upon them. We made so many rules and regulations to destroy their freedom: all duties and no rights. Any old law book you take: duty, duty, duty; no right at all. So this girl was to sing. The raja of Khetri was Swamiji's disciple. He requested Swamiji to come. Swamiji said, 'No. What am I to do with a girl singing.' Fortunately, the girl sang a song by Surdas, a well known song on this very subject of discrimination: '*Prabhu mere avaguna chita na dharo; samadarsi hai nam tiharo*; O Lord, do not look upon my evil qualities, for your name is "the same-sighted"'. As soon as Swamiji heard it he said to himself: 'This girl has taught me real Vedanta. I made this distinction. Never again shall I do so.' He treated her as a teacher of Vedanta.

After he came back from America, in Lahore he poured out his heart that this evil must be blot-

ted out from India. That is a very famous lecture. In many other lectures also he has referred to this. Letters written from America—most inspiring letters—contained plenty of this. But in the Lahore lecture you get from Swamiji the most striking expression of disgust and sorrow at this treatment of man by man in India. This was delivered on 12 November 1897. He says:

Ay, in this country of ours, the very birth-place of the Vedanta, our masses have been hypnotised for ages into that state [of slavery]. To touch them is pollution, to sit with them is pollution! Hopeless they were born, hopeless they must remain! And the result is that they have been sinking, sinking, sinking, and have come to the last stage to which a human being can come. For what country is there in the world where man has to sleep with the cattle? And for this, blame nobody else, do not commit the mistake of the ignorant. The effect is here and the cause is here too. We are to blame. Stand up, be bold, and take the blame on your own shoulders. Do not go about throwing mud at others; for all the faults you suffer from, you are the sole and only cause.

Young men of Lahore, understand this, therefore, this great sin, hereditary and national, is on our shoulders. There is no hope for us. You may make thousands of societies, twenty thousand political assemblages, fifty thousand institutions. These will be of no use until there is that sympathy, that love, that heart that thinks for all; until Buddha's heart comes once more into India, until the words of the Lord Krishna are brought to their practical use, there is no hope for us.'

Swamiji continues:

Therefore, young men of Lahore, raise once more that mightly [*sic*] banner of Advaita, for on no other ground can you have that wonderful love until you see that the same Lord is present everywhere. Unfurl that banner of love! 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.' Arise, arise once more, for nothing can be done without renunciation. If you want to help others, your little self must go. In the words of the Christians—you cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. Have Vairagya. Your ancestors gave up the world for doing great things. At the present time there

are men who give up the world to help their own salvation. Throw away everything, even your own salvation, and go and help others. Ay, you are always talking bold words, but here is practical Vedanta before you. Give up this little life of yours. What matters it if you die of starvation—you and I and thousands like us—so long as this nation lives? The nation is sinking, the curse of unnumbered millions is on our heads—those to whom we have been giving ditch-water to drink when they have been dying of thirst and while the perennial river of water was flowing past, the unnumbered millions whom we have allowed to starve in sight of plenty, the unnumbered millions to whom we have talked of Advaita and whom we have hated with all our strength, the unnumbered millions for whom we have invented the doctrine of Lokāchāra (usage), to whom we have talked theoretically that we are all the same and all are one with the same Lord, without even an ounce of practice. ‘Yet, my friends, it must be only in the mind and never in practice!’ [This is what orthodox people tell you]. Wipe off this blot. ‘Arise and awake.’ What matters it if this little life goes? Everyone has to die, the saint or the sinner, the rich or the poor. The body never remains for anyone. Arise and awake and be perfectly sincere. Our insincerity in India is awful; what we want is character, that steadiness and character that make a man cling on to a thing like grim death.

Narayana Guru

Sri Narayana Guru did tremendous work to raise the untouchables in Kerala. Swamiji visited Kerala in December 1892 and found not only untouchability but also ‘un-approachability’ and ‘un-seeability’. If you see a certain person, you have to go and take a bath. That kind of people were there. Swamiji said, ‘What inference would you draw except that these Malabaris are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums, and that they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better.’ That Kerala undertook a tremendous reform of this system through one great teacher: Sri Narayana Guru. Coming from the untouchable class, he had learnt Ayurveda and knew Sanskrit. He did not fight with anybody; did

not abuse any of the upper classes. He only served his own people telling them: ‘Get education, try to stand on your own feet. Everything will come.’ This produced wonders. Within a few years, the untouchables of Kerala ceased to be untouchables. In 1936, the Maharaja of Travancore opened the temples for all communities of Hindus, to untouchables as well. And today when you go there, you do not find any untouchability. Those people have come up very high economically and educationally. Sri Narayana Guru’s was a non-political approach—purely spiritual, social, and educational. He was a great Advaitin who honoured both the upper and the lower classes.

That is the story of Kerala. The whole of India needs to understand this way of raising the common people. A positive attitude, education, economic opportunity, and economic freedom—with these made available, untouchability will go. Fortunately, the Indian constitution has broken its back by banning it. Our education and democratic institutions will help us to banish it step by step, and within a few decades you can hope to see that this evil, which has been dogging us for hundreds of years, will be a thing of the past. It is for this that India produced a Ramakrishna and a Vivekananda, followed by Mahatma Gandhi. All of them worked for this great transformation. Among the untouchables we had Narayana Guru in Kerala taking a spiritual path of development and Dr Ambedkar in the western part of India taking the political and social path. Whatever may be the path, the programme is very clear: Untouchability will be wiped away from this country once for all by the spread of education and by the spread of Vivekananda literature throughout India. This is the great work before us. You can take it for granted that it is going to happen. That is the meaning of the modern chapter of India’s long history. Our philosophy is great. Society is full of inequalities. We shall create a society based upon that philosophy. Therefore, Vivekananda called it Practical Vedanta. With the practice of Vedanta you will have no untouchability, no caste-exclusiveness in this country.



Beyond Distinctions

Swami Narasimhananda

I HAVE a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.¹ When Martin Luther King uttered these historic words on 28 August 1963 at Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, he probably did not know about the shooting away of a man by a prophet who established the loftiest philosophy on earth some twelve hundred years ago. Is it not striking that Shankaracharya, the propounder of Advaita Vedanta, asked a person considered an outcaste by society to move away from his path? Is it not equally singular that the outcaste challenged the acharya asking him to explain the difference between the two of them? On realizing his mistake, Shankaracharya bowed to the outcaste and gave vent to his thoughts in a verse pentad called *Manisha Panchakam*. This incident shows that even the most advanced acharya did have strong notions of social difference and privilege ingrained in him, thanks to social prejudices. More than a dozen centuries away, we are still living these distinctions. Why can we not go beyond them? What is stopping us?

We see differences in the life around us. Nature has a wide spectrum of shapes, sizes, and colours. Human beings have created, and continue to create, a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional world of their own. When out on a morning walk through the neighbourhood park, coursing our way past dew-covered flowers, stopping awhile to listen to the chirping of the bird flying past, patting the neck of our pet dog, glancing at other neighbours of all ages and contours also on their morning walk, do we not feel blessed to be in this world, to be able to enjoy these varieties of life? Yes, we all love these variations—different dresses, different cuisine, different places; we do love to be different ourselves!

The flip side of differentiation is that some people are denied something only because they are different in some way from others.

Patterns of Segregation

This exclusion based on difference is the cause of much suffering and ignorance in this world. Differences originate due to the sense of duality. Duality causes fear², and it is this fear that provokes discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and countless other vices perpetrated by one being on another.

How are living beings different from each other? Biology tells us that all living organisms are made up of the same basic unit—the cell. The *Vivekachudamani* reminds us that ‘all human bodies are made of skin, flesh, blood, arteries and veins, fat, marrow, and bones.’³ Moreover, they are made up of the essence of food⁴ and are subject to the six modifications of genesis, existence, alteration, growth, decay, and destruction.⁵ Therefore, these differences of human bodies are only skin-deep, external differences.

Over time human beings have stratified society, based on different criteria, with the purpose of establishing a harmonious and functional social system. To facilitate easy communication and cooperation among fellow beings, several distinct categories—intellectuals, administrators, businessmen, workers, and so on—were recognized. Ironically, these very divisions have led to mutual strife and disconcertion over and over again. Even now nothing much has changed in this respect, in spite of the trend towards globalization. If anything, new excuses for divisions and consequent discrimination have been emerging. Of all these divisions the one most widely discussed in the Indian context is the division of caste.

Originally the caste system was meant to be a logical division of social responsibilities based on

the traits and occupation of individuals.⁶ In course of time, persons taking birth in families with a specific occupation found it easier to take up the same activity due to their upbringing in the given atmosphere. This led to caste being determined on the basis of birth. The ruling class and the priest class, however, created laws to ensure that they had an upper hand in all matters regarding society. This led to many inhuman practices, one such being the creation of a class of outcastes who were ostracized and humiliated. As a reaction, a considerable awakening took place among the oppressed classes of India in the last century. They have secured places for themselves in all-important spheres of society. Sadly though, the problem of discrimination has not been solved yet, though the odds are now shifting towards the hitherto upper castes. Discrimination, and to a lesser extent exploitation, continues, with caste demographics playing a pivotal role in society and politics.

Conflicts in the name of religion are witnessed across the world. Disputes caused by disparities of wealth are also very common and have led to many social upheavals. Modern times have brought discrimination on the basis of one's profession to the fore, though not in the sense of the caste system of the Indian subcontinent. Persons engaged in fields like software or technology are enjoying a social advantage the world over. The arrogance of lawyers, doctors, professional accountants, and people in power is an irritating issue for many common citizens. The tendency to distinguish, discriminate, and sometimes even eliminate seems to have been so deeply entrenched in human beings that even persons suffering from such highly debilitating diseases as leprosy, and in our times Aids, have been isolated and gifted a more painful death than what their illnesses would have brought them. Diseases like Alzheimer's, which require a deep understanding and constant care of the patient, have not been given proper attention. The human being likes to constantly seek polarities and tussle with them. Often, an attempt to provide a solution to one such polarity leads to the creation of further

divisions. This has become a pattern in the history of humankind.

The Solution: Addressing the Divinity in All

Swami Vivekananda gave a solution to the problem of distinctions when he said, 'Each soul is potentially divine.'⁷ It is noteworthy that he talked about all souls and not human beings alone. The inherent divinity of all living beings is brought home through this utterance. Imagine the world of difference it would make if we could only remember this truth in our daily life. Would we be arrogant in our disposition towards those socially or economically in a lower stratum? Not mere tact or public relation techniques, but awareness of the same divine essence dwelling in all beings should be our guiding factor while dealing with everybody. An excerpt from the life of Swami Ashokananda suggests the feasibility of such awareness:

Swami: Infinite care, infinite pains—that is the only way, Marie Louise. Work for the Lord as though He were your father, your mother, your friend. He is all-pervasive Spirit, infinitely good. He is so subtle that the slightest tinge of grossness gives Him pain. That is why we must take care in His work.

(The phone rang and Swami talked with Mr. Guttererson, the architect, about the new temple.)

Me [Marie Louise Burke]: That was magnificent! You were so tactful.

Swami: No, not tactful. I have deep respect for man. Man is divine.⁸

More often than not, we mask our true feelings in our interpersonal relations. A clear understanding of the true divine nature of all beings will enable us to shed this mask and embrace everybody with equal love. If we remember this divinity, will we be afraid of anyone? Will anyone be afraid of us? The mere awareness of this immanent divinity will lead us to radiate a joyful acceptance of our fellow beings.

Many distinctions among people are due to differences in upbringing. It is not proper to despise a

All the religions and revelatory books that man has produced on our planet, one and all, do not contain a consistent universal truth. This is so because in every such book are to be seen passages interpolated into those texts by certain groups of individuals, as the situation in their view warranted and as their dogmatism and mulishness dictated. Consequently those religions or faiths did not in the final analysis work towards the good of all. This in turn resulted in sects and sectarianism. Small wonder that these sects hated and turned against each other.

Secondly the Creator of this universe is also the Creator of human beings. It would not be surprising if He, because He is merciful, would want all human beings to enjoy all human privileges and rights. In reality, however, this does not happen and human beings suffer unbearable miseries of various kinds.

In sum, this solar system and naturally the planet earth which we inhabit are created by one Creator. Why is it then that the human beings living in different states and nations hate each other? How and why are the foolish passions of religion and national hatreds generated?

—Jyotirao Phule, *The Book of the True Faith* (1891)

person because he or she had not the opportunity to grow under better circumstances. On the contrary, such persons require more support and consideration. In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

If there is inequality in nature, still there must be equal chance for all—or if greater for some and for some less—the weaker should be given more chance than the strong. In other words, a Brahmin is not so much in need of education as a Chandala. If the son of a Brahmin needs one teacher, that of a Chandala needs ten. For, greater help must be given to him whom nature has not endowed with an acute intellect from birth.⁹

A person who commits an error should not be condemned for life, for it is from mistakes that we learn: ‘Man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth’ (1.17). Moreover, it is often the daring that com-

mit mistakes. People should not be discriminated against because they make different choices in life, even if a choice is not in keeping with the general ethos of the society. Wrongdoers are able to correct themselves faster and more easily if they are not victims of prejudice. In one of his letters, Swami Vivekananda wrote:

Those who, even in a chapel, would think this is a public woman, that man is of a low caste, a third is poor, and yet another belongs to the masses—the less be the number of such people (that is, whom you call gentlemen), the better. Will they who look to the caste, sex, or profession of Bhaktas appreciate our Lord? I pray to the Lord that hundreds of public women may come and bow their heads at His feet; it does not matter if not one gentleman comes. Come public women, come drunkards, come thieves and all—His Gate is open to all (6.369–70).

When Swami Vivekananda proclaimed a new gospel that emphasizes the innate divinity of all beings, the focus of religion was shifted from some unknown God residing in a celestial world to the God present in our fellow beings, the countless beautiful godheads we are fortunate to live amongst. Upon the realization of the potential divinity of beings, our daily lives become a continuous communion with the Divine; we go beyond our and other’s minor shortcomings with the conviction that these are caused by an incomplete manifestation of that inner Divinity and not limitations of our real nature per se. Elaborating this point, Swami Ashokananda opines:

I have always felt that there are infinite differences because self-manifestation depends on difference, but that, however different in form, all beings are equally valuable as manifestations of the Spirit. Each species, as it were, represents a different kind of self-manifestation of the Divine, in no way inferior or superior to any other kind. We human beings, for example, interpret the rest of the known universe or even the imagined universe, in terms of human consciousness. So if we see in trees, say, very little of human consciousness or behavior according to human conscious-

ness, then we think that trees are vastly inferior to human beings in the scale of things. But that is a mistake. Why should you think that all manifestations are in terms of human consciousness and human behavior? To think so means that you are equating humanity with Divinity; but humanity is not Divinity. A human being, when he realizes God, transcends the limitations and peculiarities of human nature.¹⁰

Generally, our perceptions of people are coloured by our notions of moral and cultural evolution. This is the reason why we feel uncomfortable while dealing with new people or cultures. The way out is to focus on the divine essence of all living beings and think beyond our rigid mental prejudices.

Structured or patterned societal behaviour is a great stumbling block to transcending prejudice. It is precisely this behaviour and way of thinking that we have to break free from. To do this, we need to understand that aesthetics, ethics, and other values of life may not actually be as structured as we think they are. For instance, to Mother Nature a maggot may be as beautiful as a peacock, and bacteria that kill us are as much a part of her economy as we are. In this vast universe, our dimension is infinitesimally small. Creating a structured world and trying to make all beings conform to such structures is the most absurd and outrageous thing humans have attempted and are still attempting.

Segregation of all kinds is caused by lack of inclination to perceive the underlying unity of the universe. Differences may bring comfort to the privileged, who bask in the illusory sunshine of superiority. When the outcaste challenged Shankaracharya upon being driven away, he just reaffirmed the essential non-difference between them. Sometimes we even create further divisions in our attempt to correct the causes of existing differences. The celebrated thinker Michel Foucault has constantly stood against discrimination of all kinds, especially discrimination against criminals, the mentally ill, and other marginal people. His radical view on the class divide that is created in the process of meting

out justice is worth a mention: 'In the courts society as a whole does not judge one of its members but ... a social category with an interest in order judges another that is dedicated to disorder.'¹¹

Since we have such seemingly logical patterns in our mind and since due to these patterns various notions of difference arise, we can safely infer that all distinctions are creations of our mind. The promising side of this human propensity is that if we can be vigilant and alter the patterns in our mind, we may well achieve a different perspective on the manifested world—with the vivid stamp of divinity all over.

An incident in the life of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is an example of this realization of the same divinity in all beings. One day a monastic attendant treated a pet cat roughly for stealing food and dashed it against the earth. Mother felt very sad. She said to the monk: 'Scold the cat, but do not beat it. Please feed it regularly and see that it does not go to any other house to steal food. ... Do not beat the cat. I dwell inside the cat too.'¹² It is the same consciousness that pervades all beings.¹³ Keeping in mind this essential sameness would help in transcending distinctions of all kinds. With the conviction that the entire world is our family, we can overcome many differences amongst us.¹⁴


Vedanta offers a unique solution to the problem of difference. Through a systematic process, it helps us to see through the veil of external appearances, transcend the limitations of the body-mind complex, and perceive the real nature of beings—the Atman. It is due to delusion that we see differences of bodies and mental states in the homogenous manifestation of the same consciousness.¹⁵ Either by eliminating the temporal appearances or by constantly affirming the true Reality unaffected by external conditions, one gets the knowledge of the absolute Reality immanent in all beings. Upon the dawn of such knowledge, all differences—including that of social positions—vanish and only the all-pervading Consciousness is perceived.¹⁶ Such a person automatically goes beyond all distinctions and perceives the innate divinity of all beings.

Hope: Even for the Atheist

For one with religious leanings, the concept of immanent divinity comes as a great help in the effort to transcend distinctions. But what about the atheist? Is there any way for the atheist to go beyond the apparent distinctions of the world? Irrespective of our religious beliefs, we do see certain characteristics common to all beings. One such characteristic is life. Another is the idea of propriety, called conscience in common parlance. When a person meets another, there is an unseen inclination to develop a relationship—paradoxical though it may appear, given the tendency to discriminate that we have been highlighting. In today's context, with the aid of technology, national boundaries are constantly being blurred and new cross-cultural ties are developing. Even such avowed atheists as Richard Dawkins seem to believe that ethical behaviour is practised not only due to fear of chastisement or fear of misery in another life but also, or more likely due to, the general good sense inherent in human beings, for normally, a being does not like to come in conflict with another being. Dawkins writes:

We do not—even the religious among us—ground our morality in holy books, no matter what we may fondly imagine. How, then, do we decide what is right and what is wrong? No matter how we answer that question, there is a consensus about what we do as a matter of fact consider right and wrong: a consensus that prevails surprisingly widely. The consensus has no obvious connection with religion. It extends, however, to most religious people, whether or not they *think* their morals come from scripture. ... The majority of us don't cause needless suffering; we believe in free speech and protect it even if we disagree with what is being said; we pay our taxes; we don't cheat, don't kill, don't commit incest, don't do things to others that we would not wish done to us.¹⁷

Extending the same reasoning a little further, even if one does not swear allegiance to any concept of God or Divinity, it is possible for one to deal with others shedding all inhibitions born out of seeming distinctions and be aware of the underlying common factor of life in all beings.

In sum, mitigating all differences on the path to the realization of the immanent divinity will help us overcome the limitations caused by differentiation. We need to see through the exterior into the true nature of ourselves as well as that of our fellow beings. We need to venture in this bold pursuit to discover that divinity or the underlying common factor of life which blends all beings into one reality. Then physical, intellectual, and spiritual differences will not stand in the way of harmonious human relationships. Then, and then only, will we be able to live in a global, rather universal, village. That will no more be a life of isolated beings trying to interact with each other, but the life of all beings living as one unit. Mutual understanding will be natural and exploitation and oppression will be neutralized. We will indeed be blessed on the awakening of this consciousness! 

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5. Yaska, *Nirukta*, 1.2.8.
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13. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 6.11.
14. *Mahopanishad*, 6.71.
15. Shankaracharya, *Sarva-vedanta-siddhanta-sara-sangraha*, 462.
16. Dattatreya, *Avadhuta Gita*, 1.45.
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Bridging Social Divides: The Indian Way

A P N Pankaj

*Puṁstve strīṭve viśeṣo vā jāti-nāmāśramādayaḥ;
Na kāraṇam mad-bhajane bhaktireva hi kāraṇam.
Yajña-dāna-tapobhirvā vedādhyayana-karmabhiḥ;
Naiva draṣṭum-aham śakyo mad-bhakti-
vimukhaiḥ sadā.*

The state of being a man or a woman, or belonging to a particular caste or station of life, or having a special name is not a qualification for adoring me. Bhakti or loving devotion is the only qualification. I cannot be seen by those who are opposed to bhakti, though they undertake sacrifice, charity, austerity, study of the Vedas, and other good deeds.¹

*Jati panti kula dharma badai;
Dhana bala parijana guna chaturai.
Bhagatihina nara sobai kaisa;
Binu jala barida dekhia jaisa.*

High caste, rank, and lineage; religiosity, reputation, wealth, power, associations, virtue, and skill—a person (possessing all these but) lacking in bhakti is much like a cloud without water.²

To deliberate on the issue of social divides—on matters relating to varna, jati, class, race, or caste—in the Indian context, is to step upon the proverbial minefield of controversies, contradictions, and even violent conflicts. Much harm has been done to the unity and integrity of India by proponents as well as opponents of caste and class divisions; Indian society has, in recent decades in particular, passed through several bouts of physical and psychological trauma over these questions, with relatively little gain. The founding fathers of the Indian constitution enshrined in its preamble ‘equality of status’ and ‘opportunity’ in order to promote among Indian citizens ‘fraternity’, ‘assuring the dignity of the individual and unity and integrity of the nation’. Nearly six decades after the adoption of this constitution our search for equal-

ity has run into proliferating divisions, increased dissensions, mutual hatred, and occasional mayhem. Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship has been translated into waywardness, licentiousness, and one-upmanship. Justice—social, economic, and political—has become distant and more expensive. India’s resolve to become a casteless society notwithstanding, issues of class, caste, and race raise their head at regular intervals, and take an ugly turn almost every time they do so. Efforts, such as they are, of the central and state governments to appease one group, provoke two others to claim privileges for themselves, and the process seems endless.

If we have begun this article on a sombre note, it is to underline the question that even if the *varṇa vyavasthā* or caste system has harmed our society—yes, no doubt it has—have the remedies and measures for redress proved effective? Or, do we need to look at the issue dispassionately and seek fresh solutions from the essentials of the Indian tradition?

The Origins of Varna

Although the debate on the origin of the Aryans and their presumed migration from outside India has some relevance to our subject, we would not enter into it. Whatever be the truth of the matter, it appears that at some stage there were compulsions and motivations strong enough to lead the Vedic Indians to form themselves into specific groups, with a view to bringing order into society. *Rta*, the sacred order mentioned in the Vedas, had turned ‘stern’, *ṛtam-ugram*.³ In Buddhist literature we find the following interesting narrative attributed to the Buddha:

As men lost their primeval glory distinctions of class (*varṇa*) arose, and they entered into

agreements one with another, accepting the institutions of private property and the family. With this theft, murder, adultery, and other crime began, and so the people met together and decided to appoint one man among them to maintain order in return for a share of the produce of their fields and herds. He was called 'the Great Chosen One' (*Mahāsammata*), and he received the title of *rāja* because he pleased the people.⁴

The above story, to which credence is given by Jains as well, may be a fanciful myth, yet it does point to the necessity of evolving some sort of system for the internal control of society. There was also the need for standing up to the opponents of one's own clan. Referring to the *Aitareya Brahmana*, Basham reminds us that the earliest legend about the origin of kingship speaks of the gods suffering badly in a war with the demons and deciding to appoint Indra as their king to lead them. With this, the tide soon turned in their favour.⁵ In any case, the Aryans came into conflict with the *dasyus* and *dāsas*—the two words are used synonymously in the Rig Veda—the dark-complexioned tribal population. Perhaps the growing needs of habitation, cultivation, cattle grazing, and allied activities—the result of increase in population—compelled the Aryans to do so. Perhaps conflicting ambitions or notions of exclusivity arising from differences in complexion and culture were the cause of the clashes. A combination of these or similar factors could have led to the establishment of a strong order in Aryan society. The overriding consideration, however, appears to have been self-preservation. The Sanskrit word *varna* does of course mean 'complexion', but that is not its sole connotation. According to P V Kane:

This does not mean that there was difference between the two in bodily appearance only; on the contrary, the antithesis between the *ārya* who is referred to as 'barhiṣmat' and the *dasyu* who is styled 'avratā' clearly shows that the emphasis was rather on the difference of their cults. ... It is possible to say that *dāsas* or *dasyus* were some Aryan tribes that had fallen from the worship or culture of the

Aryan singers of Vedic hymns. In many places the sage refers to the conquest for him by Indra and other gods of *dāsas* as well as Aryan foes. ... This shows that though the Aryans had become divided and fought among themselves, they kept *āryas* and *dāsas* quite distinct.⁶

The transition to the elaborate caste system found in the Yajur Veda was a consequence of growing social complexities and a felt urgency among the far-sighted intellectuals of the community to preserve the Aryan culture. It is clear that right from early times this thinking class was respected highly by the other constituents of society. Instances from those early days of one brother becoming a priest and the other a king, and of members of one family engaging in different vocations are on record.⁷ Although the word 'brahmana' and the word *viś*, denoting the commoner, occur frequently in the Rig Veda, mention of the four *varnas* concurrently is seen for the first time in the 'Purusha Sukta', which is a later hymn. The word *rājanya* is not, according to P V Kane, found anywhere in the Rig Veda, except in the 'Purusha Sukta', although 'kṣatriya' or *kṣtra* occurs frequently.⁸ The terms 'brahmana', 'kṣatriya', 'vaishya', and 'śudra'—denoting the four *varnas*—came to have different shades of meaning over a period of time. The word *varna*, which signified differences in colour and culture, also gradually evolved to mean 'caste'. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observes:

The confusion between the tribal and the occupational is the cause of the perpetuation of the old exclusiveness of the tribal customs in the still stringent rules which govern the constitution of each caste. Caste on its social side is a product of human organization and not a mystery of divine appointment. ... The whole is present in each part, while each part is indispensable to the whole. ... The functions of the different castes were regarded as equally important to the well-being of the whole. The serenity of teacher, the heroism of warrior, the honesty of the business man, and the patience and energy of the worker all contribute to the social growth.⁹

Caste, Discrimination, and Privilege

Delineating the duties of the four castes, the *Atri Samhita* emphasizes that even a shudra attains to heaven by carrying out his ordained duties; the duties assigned to others should he shunned—though they be tempting.¹⁰ It is not just caste differentiation that the *Atri Samhita* describes. It also notes that a brahmana could be a god, a rishi, a king, a trader, or a menial worker, and goes on to describe the features of each personality type (371–83).

Although there are instances of kshatriyas challenging the brahmanic supremacy, and even attaining to brahmanahood, the brahmana, to use the current idiom, was the leader of the knowledge society. This status had been earned by virtue of voluntary renunciation of luxurious life, practice of self-control, and engagement in intellectual and spiritual pursuits. The very word ‘brahmana’ means ‘one who knows or is pursuing the knowledge of Brahman—pure Consciousness—or of the Vedas; *brahma vedam suddham caitanyam va veti adhite va*’. According to Swami Vivekananda the ideal brahmana is one in whom ‘worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present’. Further: ‘If the Brahmin is he who has killed all selfishness and who lives and works to acquire and propagate wisdom and the power of love—if a country is altogether inhabited by such Brahmins, by men and women who are spiritual and moral and good, is it strange to think of that country as being above and beyond all law?’¹¹

It is the qualities enumerated above that characterize a brahmana who earns the gratitude of his or her countrymen and whom society approaches for guidance and counsel. Again, it is these qualities alone that contributed to the status of Indians as spiritually inclined people. But even the loftiest of ideals degenerates with time. Kane maintains that the caste system ‘was not an artificial product due to the intrigues, greed, and cunning of brāhmaṇas’. It may well have been so during the Vedic period when shudras, as Kane establishes by providing extensive textual references, were not untouchables.¹² But it is difficult to go along with Kane so far as

subsequent developments are concerned. As we move into later times, we see brahmanas arrogating to themselves superhuman authority, claiming even to control the gods. Taking advantage of the simplicity of the common folk and their own intellectual prowess, brahmanas turned themselves into centres of power, evoking the ‘fear of the unknown’ even among kings and warriors. Of course it would be incorrect to club all brahmanas together into this category, for there have always been many who have been true to the ideals of brahmanahood. Those who were lured by lust, money, and power, were perhaps hoping to reap the harvest of the wisdom and sacrifice of their ancestors. Such were the brahmanas that forsook the path of sadhana, claimed hereditary privileges, and took to the dubious practice of magic, medicine, and incantations. A class that had been instrumental in establishing India’s identity as a land of spirituality, and that had evolved some of the finest values for Indian society, also contributed the basest elements which continue to cause convulsions in the Hindu society even today.

A body of post-Vedic literature inherited by us—and here we shall not enter into the controversy about original texts and interpolations—has caused incalculable damage to Indian society, as practices influenced by this corpus have proved to be too deep-rooted and widespread to be extirpated easily. The multiplicity, complexity, and variety of rituals, laws, modes of punishment, principles of pardon, and prescriptions for expiation, if astonishing for a modern educated person, were certainly a source of fear for the common, God-fearing, uneducated people of medieval times. Not only so, as a result of the social inequities pronounced and practised, a large mass of humanity was reduced to being ‘the children of a lesser God’. It has been said that some of the laws and rules prescribed in the Smritis might never have been actually put into practice. Even if this is true, one cannot deny the oppression that the so-called lower classes had to suffer. Even in its day-to-day practices, Hinduism had become, to use Swami Vivekananda’s words, ‘don’t touchism’ and a

religion of the kitchen. Echoing similar views, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: 'The day-to-day religion of the orthodox Hindu is more concerned with what to eat and what not to eat, who to eat with and from whom to keep away, than with spiritual values. The rules and regulations of the kitchen dominate his social life.'¹³

However, the seeds of denial and quiet revolutions were present at all times, and instances contrary to the injunctions of the Smritis were never difficult to find: 'Some of the great *r̥sis* worshipped by the Brahmins are half-castes and hybrids. Vasiṣṭha was born of a prostitute, Vyāsa of a fisher-woman, Parāśara of a Caṇḍāla girl. [And there were many others who attained brahmanahood, although they were *advijas*—of the lowest caste: *bahavo'nye'pi vipratvaṃ prāptaye pūrvam advijāb.*']'¹⁴ Romaharshana, the expounder of the Puranas, was a Suta, considered quite low in the caste hierarchy. Yet he would be offered a high seat, and numerous rishis would sit before him listening to his discourses.

In the interest of a fair understanding of the phenomenon of social and racial discrimination, and not as a consolation to justify the wrongs in Indian society, it may not be out of place to recall the treatment accorded to the San or Bushmen in Africa, or to the Australian aborigines by the European colonists and to the Negroes in the southern states of the US. Lumholtz reported that 'once or twice colonists offered to shoot blacks for him so that he might get their skulls'. The discrimination against Negroes took various forms: 'residential segregation, separation of the races in public conveyances and places of amusement, exclusions of negroes from public institutions and educational discrimination. Disfranchisement and social discrimination had their counterpart in all branches of industry except agriculture and domestic and personal service.'¹⁵

Compare this with the following:

Our overall impression is that in no other part of the ancient world were the relations of man and

man, and of man and the state, so fair and humane. In no other civilization were slaves so few in number, and in no other ancient lawbook are their rights so well protected as in the *Arthaśāstra*. ... The ghastly sadism of the kings of Assyria, who flayed their captives alive, is completely without parallel in ancient India. ... To us the most striking feature of ancient Indian civilization is its humanity.¹⁶

(To be concluded)

Notes and References

1. *Adhyatma Ramayana*, 3.10.20–1. Sri Ramachandra spoke these words to Shabari.
2. *Ramcharitmanas*, 3.34.3.
3. Atharva Veda, 12.1.1.
4. A L Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (Fontana, 1975), 83.
5. In the Rig Veda, Indra has been frequently referred to as king and the mighty slayer of *asuras*. Over time, his title did remain *devarāja*, king of gods, though he lost his pre-eminence to Vishnu whose favours all gods, including Indra himself, besought in times of difficulty.
6. P V Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1997), 2.26–7. The term *barhiṣmat* means 'worshipper, one provided with sacrificial grass, having fire or light, blazing, shining, or a sacrificial', and the term *avṛata* 'not observing rites or obligations, lawless, disobedient, or wicked'. In the *Abhijana-sakuntala*, Kalidasa uses the word *dasyu* for 'bandit'.
7. Yaska, *Nirukta*, 2.10; Rig Veda 9.112.3.
8. *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 2.29–32.
9. S Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1998), 85–6.
10. *Atri Samhita*, 18. In the very next verse, however, the text suggests that 'a shudra who takes to japa and homa should be put to death by the king as he destroys the kingdom much like water quenching a fire'. A more balanced view is provided by the Bhagavadgita, 3.35; 18.47–8.
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Brahmana: The Dynamics of Interpretation

Dr Saurav Basu

SINCE its origin in the late Vedic age, the hierarchy of the Hindu social order has heralded the brahmana as the supreme figurehead of the social ladder—the highest representative of the system of varna and ashrama.¹ The Shastric authority, created principally by brahmanas, has been viewed largely as ritual-centric, that is to say, hereditary ritualistic power has been seen as the constant theme typifying brahmanical dominance.² Such a view, however, fails to take into account the ideal of being and becoming ‘Brahman’. The essence of this brahmana ideal or *brahmanatva* is not only found interspersed in a vast array of texts but is also represented continuously through successive generations of canonical works, both *astika* and *nastika*, that is both brahmanical and non-brahmanical. The objective of this article is to delineate the textual continuity of the brahmanical ideal through a span of two thousand years—from 400 BCE to 1400 CE. Among brahmanical sources, I will limit myself to some of the Upanishads, the *Manu Smriti*, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavata. Among non-brahmanical sources, the Dhammapada of Buddha will be the chief reference. The *dohas* of Kabir will serve as the other important non-brahmanical source. Nevertheless, by no means is the *brahmanatva* ideal limited to these texts alone. I also hope to be able to highlight that the *brahmanatva* ideal is the common thread that runs through this mass of texts, separated as they are by considerable differences of space, time, and ideology.

At the outset, I would like to state that I am deliberately confining myself to the textual status of the varnas and am not examining their actual functional roles, for it is only the texts that interpret the brahmana to be the supreme incarnation of the Divine Being in the most unambiguous man-

ner. Moreover, the subalterns in India, since time immemorial, have unanimously perceived only the brahmanas amongst the upper castes as the highest in the social hierarchy irrespective of their actual socio-economic position; and this mindset has been entrenched because the texts upheld the former’s position. In other words, it has always been the brahmanas who have been the prime subjects of the subaltern’s reverence and revulsion. They have been the chief instigators of the dual but antithetical processes of Sanskritization and segregation.³

The Upanishads

One of the earliest Upanishads, the *Chhandogya*, is probably the first to boldly assert the *brahmanatva* ideal. Satyakama, the son of the maid servant Jabala, wanted to go to the great rishi Gautama for his education. Satyakama had never known a father. He asked his mother about it only to learn that even she did not know who his father was, as she had conceived him ‘while serving many people’. She suggested that as he was Satyakama and she Jabala, he could introduce himself as Satyakama Jabala. When Gautama asked Satyakama about his *gotra*, lineage, he told him what had transpired between him and his mother. Gautama said to Satyakama: ‘Son, no one other than a brahmana can speak the truth that you have spoken. Therefore you are a brahmana, and I accept you.’⁴ Here a brahmana is defined as one who is unflinching and uncompromising in his adherence to truth. Therefore, speaking the truth always—even amidst adversity—is the sign of a brahmana.

In the same Upanishad Shwetaketu’s father is alarmed at the prospect of his son being ridiculed as a *brahmana-bandhu*, ‘a friend of the brahmanas’, for neglecting study (6.1.1). Here a brahmana is one who possesses the highest learning.

In the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* the great sage Yajñavalkya declares King Janaka to be a brahmana, for he is a knower of Brahman—the absolute undifferentiated cosmic Spirit, one without a second, encompassing all existence: ‘That great, birthless Self is undecaying, immortal, undying, and fearless; it is Brahman (infinite). Brahman is indeed fearless. He who knows it as such certainly becomes the fearless Brahman.’ Here elimination of the great fear of disease and death in the presence of the knowledge of Brahman is considered the hallmark of brahmanahood.⁵

In the same scripture Yajñavalkya provides the brilliant woman sage Gargi with this unique philosophical-cum-mystical insight into the definition of a real brahmana: ‘One, O Gargi, who departs from this world without knowing this Imperishable (Reality), is miserable, a *kṛipana*. But one, O Gargi, who departs from this world after knowing this Imperishable, is a brahmana’ (3.8.10).

The *Vājasuchika Upanishad* questions the very identity of the Vedic brahmana! It explores the various possible connotations of the term ‘brahmana’—‘jīva’, ‘physical body’, ‘performer of religious rites’, ‘possessor of esoteric knowledge’, and ‘the upholder of dharma’. The Upanishad systematically rejects all these options—giving suitable reasons for doing so—and arrives at a radically new definition of the term ‘brahmana’:

The Self is without a second; devoid of the distinction of caste, trait, and action; bereft of all such faults as the six imperfections (hunger, thirst, grief, confusion, old age, and death) and the six states of being (birth, existence, growth, change, decay, and death); of the nature of truth, knowledge, bliss, and infinitude; the impeller and supporter of all wills though devoid of resolve; existing in all as the indwelling Spirit; pervading everything within and without like ether; of the nature of indivisible bliss; not an object of knowledge, (and) capable of being known only through direct experience, (though) manifesting directly (as Truth). He who succeeds in perceiving it directly, like an *amalaka* fruit in the palm of one’s hand, and thus rests fulfilled; devoid of such imperfections as desire and

attachment; possessed of tranquillity, restraint, and similar virtues; free of passion, envy, greed, expectation, and infatuation; with a mind unaffected by ostentation, egoism, and the like—such a person is surely a brahmana.⁶

The Manu Smṛiti

The interpretation of the term ‘brahmana’ in the *Manu Smṛiti*—the foremost of all Smṛitis, which virtually summarizes three generations of texts—may be construed as being ambivalent on the whole. For, while it definitely upholds a rigid varna classification and supports hereditary transfer of brahmanical powers, there is also evidence to show that it denounces attempts at brahmanical hegemony.⁷

Manu alludes to the nature of a true brahmana as one who befriends all creatures.⁸ He informs us that if a brahmana applies himself to other tasks without having studied the Vedas, he rapidly descends into shudrahood along with his kin (2.168). He also warns those treading the path of dharma from offering even water to the ‘twice-born’ who are unacquainted with the Vedas and who undertake sham austerities (4.192).

Manu speaks of brahmanahood based on erudition and learning: ‘Neither through years, nor through grey hair, nor through wealth, nor through powerful kinsmen (is greatness achieved). The sages have made this law: He who has learnt the Vedas together with their auxiliaries, *angas*, is considered great by us’ (2.154). He adds another important clause to brahmanahood: humility. ‘A Brahmana should always fear homage as if it were poison; and constantly desire (to suffer) scorn as (he would long for) nectar’ (2.162).

Manu also grades brahmanas on the basis of their educational qualification and degree of knowledge: ‘Of Brahmanas, those learned (in the Veda, *are best*); of the learned, those who recognize (the necessity and the manner of performing the prescribed duties); of those who possess this knowledge, those who perform them; of the performers, those who know Brahman’ (1.97).

The Dhammapada

This quintessential Buddhist scripture—a part of the ‘Khuddaka Nikaya’ of the Sutta Pitaka—has an entire chapter on brahmanahood: ‘Brahmana Vagga.’⁹ In a short moral fable associated with one of the verses in this section, Buddha reprimands a man who, noting that Buddha addressed his monks as brahmanas, thought that he too was entitled to the same, having been born a brahmana. Buddha cautioned the man that one becomes a brahmana only by attaining the highest goal of nirvana. He then masterfully unravelled the secrets to becoming a brahmana, peeling off the layers of the unconscious mind which obstruct brahmanahood. A brahmana is the knower of the ‘uncreated’, the ‘unmade’. He cultivates concentration and insight, shuns evil, is forgiving, forbearing, truthful, righteous, and unafraid. He has full command over his mind and senses. His sense of renunciation is total.

The evidence of the *Dhammapada* negates the claim that Buddha was essentially anti-brahmanic. While he was against the sacrificial cult of the brahmanas, he was not against showing respect to brahmanas possessed of the aforementioned qualities. He was against priestcraft and the ritualistic dominance of priests, but his respect for the *brahmanatva* ideal cannot be questioned.

The Mahabharata and the Bhagavata

In the ‘Aranyaka Parva’ of the Mahabharata we find a yaksha questioning Yudhishtira: ‘O king, by what does brahmanahood result? Is it by *kula*, ancestry; *vritta*, conduct; *swadhyaya*, study of the Vedas; or *shruta*, hearing or culture? Tell me definitely.’

Yudhishtira answered: ‘Listen, O yaksha, it is not ancestry or study or learning of Veda or hearing or culture that is the cause of brahmanahood. Without doubt, conduct is the cause of brahmanahood. One’s conduct should always be well protected, especially by a brahmana. He who keeps his conduct unsullied never goes down.’¹⁰

We also find Yudhishtira speaking about brahmanahood to Nahusha, the serpent: ‘A person who possesses truthfulness, charity, forgiveness, sobriety,

gentleness, austerity, and lack of hatred is called a brahmana’ (3.177.16).

In the Bhagavata Narada states: ‘The characteristics of a brahmana are as follows: control of the mind and the senses, austerity and penance, cleanliness, contentment, patience, simplicity, knowledge, kindness, truthfulness, and complete surrender to the supreme Godhead.’¹¹

Another verse admits the possibility of upward mobility for lower castes: ‘If in the members born in a certain varna the qualities pertaining to another varna are seen, then they (the former) are to be classified as belonging to the latter varna’ (7.11.35).

Kabir

Kabir is known to have been one of the most vociferous critics of brahmanism and the practice of untouchability. He questions boldly: ‘O pandit, since you believe in it, tell me wherefrom came this untouchability? We eat by touching, we wash by touching, from a touch the world was born. So who is untouched?’ He then proceeds to answer his own query: ‘Only he who has no taint of maya.’

Yet, the *brahmanatva* ideal was not lost on this anti-intellectual rebel poet. In his rhetoric he negates the inessential to indirectly emphasize the essential. Kabir dismantles all brahmanical pretensions. His criticism is acerbic and difficult to digest for the orthodox, for he has no sympathy with book learning and sanctimonious preaching. He says: ‘Knowledge of the Vedas and the Puranas is useless to the one who is unaware of *swarupa jnana*, knowledge of one’s real nature; such a person is no better than an animal.’¹² The highest, purest, and most ancient interpretation of the term ‘brahmana’—the knower of the Self or Atman—is thus ultimately upheld by Kabir. Only he who has realized his innermost

All the world is the Veda, all creations the Koran,
Why read paper scriptures, O Rajjab; gather,
ever fresh wisdom from the universe.
The eternal wisdom shines within the concourse
of the millions of humanity.

—Rajjab

Being can lay claim to being called a brahmana.

The Brahmanatva Ideal

Brahmanatva, as a social and spiritual ideal, has been a constant theme in Indian philosophical thought. Even as it apprehended the concept of Brahman, the Indian mind visualized the descent of that perfect cosmic consciousness, helping evolve the social genius, the archetype of the perfect individual: the brahmana. While he may not have been Nietzsche's *Übermensch* or Aurobindo's 'Supermind', he was certainly considered the incarnation of the highest law, the embodiment of supreme virtue and intelligence.¹³

Moreover, it seems unlikely that brahmanas emerged initially as an endogamous, occupationally closed, social order, for such a conception goes against the spirit of the Vedic age, where different members of the same family involved themselves in diverse professions. For instance, Rishi Shishu, of the family of Angiras, declared: 'I am an author of mantras, my father is a medicine man, and mother grinds flour.'¹⁴

Marxist writers like Romila Thapar consider the brahmanas to have been reactionaries against the reformatory trend of Buddhist ascetics. Thapar believes that the brahmanas promulgated the ashrama theory—wherein renunciation was prescribed only in the fourth or final stage of life—at a time of trouble and as a means of countering renunciation among grihasthas. This was presumably because decline of grihastha life would automatically translate into fewer yajnas and curtailment of *dana*, religious donations, which in turn would lead to erosion of brahmanical prestige and power.¹⁵


Thapar, however, provides little literary evidence regarding early brahmanical aversion to the Buddhist reformatory trend. We may recall that the greatest calumny, slander, physical threats faced by the Buddha came not from his brahmana adversaries but from his cousin Devadatta who was responsible for the earliest schism in the Sangha. Texts highlighting brahmanic opposition actually appear a few centuries after Buddha—after the fall

of the Mauryan empire and the rise of the Sunga dynasty. The internal evidence of early Buddhist texts actually points to the high regard that Buddha had for the *brahmanatva* ideal.

The Upanishads pre-dating Buddhism uphold the brahmana as the epitome of renunciation. It is true that the ashrama theory does not seem to have been rigorously propounded prior to the time of the *Jabala Upanishad*, but the underlying ideas can be found even in the older *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, where Yajnavalkya seeks to distribute his wealth among his two wives before embarking on a life of sannyasa, despite having already reached the highest goal of enlightenment. By maintaining the brahmanical ideal, Yajnavalkya clearly seems to be setting an example for society to emulate. Finally, brahmanical prestige and power were never enhanced textually through the aggrandizement of wealth; that was the road to glory for kshatriyas alone. Of course, pragmatically speaking, wealth and prosperity are eternal markers of status in society.

This *brahmanatva* ideal was constantly threatened by certain brahmanic elements desirous of maintaining the status quo despite being shorn of actual accomplishments. The ritualistic hereditary transfer of brahmanical power was aided by the inexorable forces of social cohesion in pre-industrial societies, which crystallized and constricted society into watertight compartments. Although social mobility did not cease altogether, it remained effective only at the level of the community or jati; at the level of the individual it had, for all practical purposes, fossilized.

Social reformers, whether *astika* or *nastika*, never ceased to question—if not to caution against—the ritualistic dominance of the brahmins by juxtaposing their actual behaviour with the *brahmanatva* ideal already ingrained in the collective consciousness of the Indian people and reflected in a textual span of over two thousand years. We have to accept that the textual interpretation of the brahmanas must have been subject to extenuation due to the vicissitudes of time. In spite of that, it is indeed remarkable that social dynamics did not culmi-

nate in a radical reinterpretation of the meaning of the term 'brahmana'; the *brahmanatva* ideal had withstood social upheavals and remained unaltered as an immutable constant.¹⁶ Even as late as the nineteenth century, the patriot sage Swami Vivekananda, who had severely reprimanded the higher castes and questioned in no uncertain terms their claims to exclusive privileges, upheld the *brahmanatva* ideal: "The Brahminhood is the ideal of humanity in India, as wonderfully put forward by Shankarāchārya at the beginning of his commentary on the Gītā, where he speaks about the reason for Krishna's coming as a preacher for the preservation of Brahminhood, of Brahminness. That was the great end. This Brahmin, the man of God, he who has known Brahman, the ideal man, the perfect man, must remain; he must not go."¹⁷ 

Notes and References

1. See 'Purusha Sukta', in Rig Veda, 10.90. The brahmanas are considered to have originated from the mouth of the Cosmic Person, ksatriyas from the hands, vaishyas from the thighs, and shudras from the feet.
2. Some historians and Indologists refer pejoratively to the brahmanas as the 'priestly class', which is not wholly correct for any period of Indian history.
3. 'Sanskritization' is a term coined by the social anthropologist M N Srinivas, according to which the lower castes—whom we shall collectively call the 'subaltern'—emulate the higher castes in order to initiate an upward social mobilization. 'Segregation' here stands for the deliberate divorce from Hindu society of thousands of untouchables or Dalits due to the adamant uncompromising attitude of orthodox brahmanas, especially in cases related to the prevention of the former's entry into hallowed temple complexes.
4. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 4.4.
5. *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.23–25. Acharya Shankara's commentary on these verses beautifully elucidates this concept. See Swami Madhavananda, *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), 530–4.
6. K Narayana Swami Aiyer, *Thirty Minor Upanishads* (Delhi: Parimal, 2003), 257; translation mine.
7. I have dwelt on this in the article 'Manu and the Myth of Brahmanical Hegemony' <[http://azygos.sulekha.com/blog/post/2007/06/manu-and-the-](http://azygos.sulekha.com/blog/post/2007/06/manu-and-the-myth-of-brahmanical-hegemony.htm)

The Vision of Chokhamela

Something wonderful happened once:
God dropped in unannounced.
He walked in pell-mell, sat
down and said, get some
breakfast, won't you.
Jani said, O my lordly one,
won't you help yourself,
my friend?
God looked everywhere, raised
lids and cluttered them on;
hurried away in the burning
sun, came back with a lidful
of gruel and drawing Jani
by her hand, fed her
mouthful by mouthful.
Both fulfilled quite, belched satisfied.

Chokha, standing on the threshold,
hands outspread for the leftovers.

—*Untouchable Saints*, 138

- myth-of-brahmanical-hegemony.htm> accessed 29 September 2008.
8. *Manu Smriti*, 2.87.
9. See *Dhammapada*, trans. Ven. Narada Maha Thera (Calcutta: Maha Bodhi Society, 1991), 286–317.
10. See Mahabharata, 3.297.
11. Bhagavata, 7.11.21.
12. Abhilasa Dasa, *Kabir Amritvani* (Allahabad: Kabir Parakh Sansthan, 2005). The English translation from the original Hindi is mine.
13. See *Manu Smriti*, 1.98.
14. Rig Veda, 9.112.3.
15. See Romila Thapar, 'Ideology, Society and Upaniṣads' in *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (Oxford, 2001), 832–55.
16. However, later law texts as well as some passages in the *Manu Smriti* do support a hereditary, ritualistic, perfunctory transfer of brahmanical power and privilege, irrespective of whether one possessed *brahmanatva* or not. The latter became optional and, at most, a preferable trait, but its absence no longer led to curtailment of power and prestige, even textually.
17. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 293–4.

'Apartheid in Another Form'

Shruba Mukherjee

Hush nation
Do not cry
God
Will protect us

Freedom
We will get it
Our God
Will protect us

THULA SIZWE, a song from apartheid times in Zulu—one of South Africa's eleven official languages—carries a message of hope to black South Africans. Ironically, fourteen years after gaining freedom from apartheid, the blacks still sing this song, perhaps because their prayers have still not been granted.

The nation got its independence in 1994, ending all discriminative policies against the blacks, albeit largely on paper. The social outlook of South African citizens still tends to divide humans in the name of class and colour. Not only in terms of economic empowerment have the blacks been marginalized, their social exclusion also continues, though in subtle forms.

True, their movements are now not restricted to any particular area, and the practice of carrying permits while travelling to white-populated areas has been done away with. But even moneyed blacks are apparently not welcome in some localities of cities with a sizeable white population like Johannesburg or Cape Town. One is amazed by the beauty of the huge mansions in Johannesburg, mostly inhabited by the fair-skinned, while the dilapidated shacks cannot but move the spectator, highlighting as they do the plight of the majority of the people who have suffered only due to their skin colour.

After the end of apartheid in 1994 and the advent of majority rule, control of big businesses in both the public and private sectors still rested primarily in the hands of white individuals. According to "Statistics South Africa" whites comprise

just under 10 % of the population in South Africa, meaning that most of the country's economy was controlled by a very small minority. In its bid to redress the inequalities of apartheid, the government drew up the much-publicized Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Programme.

It sought to redress the inequities of apartheid by giving previously disadvantaged groups who are South African citizens—black Africans, the coloured, and Indians and Chinese (declared to be black in June 2008)—economic opportunities not available to them earlier. It included such measures as 'employment equity, skills development, ownership, management, socio-economic development, and preferential procurement'.

The programme was given a legal sanction by the BEE Act of 2003, an integral part of which is a sector-wide generic scorecard that rates companies according to their contribution towards the empowerment of blacks through four major yardsticks. These are: direct empowerment through ownership and control of enterprises and assets; management at senior level; human resource development, employment equity, and indirect empowerment through preferential procurement; and enterprise development and corporate social investment.

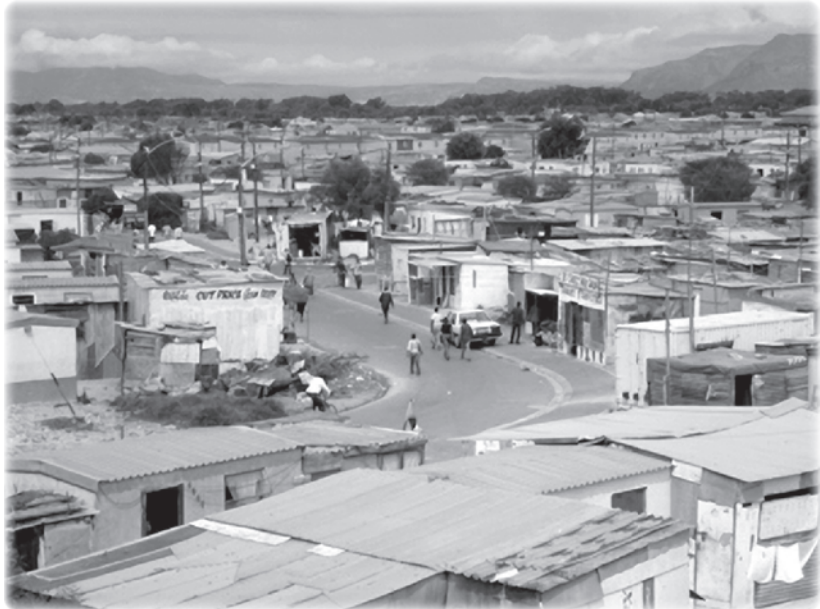
But ask Rodger, the cab driver who took us around Johannesburg about the efficacy of the programme and he gives a wry smile. 'May be it has helped the few blacks who were already rich. They had the business capital ready at hand and such programmes have facilitated investment of that money. But nothing for us,' he says. The thirty-five-year-old father of five children does not have a permanent job and his salary is deducted even if he is half an hour late to work. Ironically, the transport company he works for is not very punctual with the

payment of wages, which gets further deducted if Rodger is absent from work even for medical reasons. He cannot opt for any legal redressal as there is no law in the country banning the policy of 'hire and fire'. Thus, it is not surprising that around fifty per cent of the blacks in South Africa do not have permanent jobs. And this is happening at a time when the South African economy is experiencing the longest sustained upswing in its history. The annual gross domestic product (GDP) which was less than 1 per cent between 1994 and 2003, accelerated to 5.1 per cent in 2005.

We ask Tabo, who could not get any job except that of a porter in a five-star hotel in Cape Town, about what his children have for breakfast and he says, 'porridge'. And for lunch? 'Porridge, madam, and the same dish is on our table at dinner also,' he confesses with a shy smile. We prod him further and he gives out that the porridge his family has every day is in fact a simple mixture of maize powder and water. 'Milk, eggs, and vegetables are a luxury which we cannot afford. But sometimes we have some beef with that mixture and it becomes a feast,' he says. His school-leaving certificate could not get him an office job, as, apparently, the potential employers could not trust the 'intellectual capacity of a shack-dweller'.

Liza, the head sweeper in our hotel, walks twelve kilometres everyday to reach her place of work from her shack in a suburb of Johannesburg. The frail woman, nearing fifty, has no other option, as public transport is almost non-existent. Luxury cars like Mercedes, Bentley, BMW, and Volkswagen are more common than buses on the roads of Johannesburg. As drivers of big cars dislike speed restrictions, conveyances like two- and three-wheelers and bicycles are banned on major city roads. 'Thus, we have two options, either to wait for a bus for an hour or so and lose a part of our wage for being late, or just walk down to our place of work,' she says.

Our misconception that social exclusion is limited only to the black have-nots was cleared when



A shanty town in the outskirts of Cape Town

we saw a matric party going on in our hotel lobby. It was a party for students who had just passed out of school and were ready to enter college. On enquiry we found out that the party was contributory and, since it was taking place in a five-star hotel in Cape Town, it was quite obvious that all the students were from rich families. But none of them was white! It so happens that their school, a very prestigious institution in the city, does not have a single white student. Watching the young boys and girls, dressed in gorgeous Western outfits—dancing freely, and posing for photographs—might have been a visual delight, but it also explained the reason why social exclusion based on skin colour still continues in South Africa. The young people, who have the potential to become engines of change, are completely oblivious of such discrimination and prefer to live in ghettos and look for nothing but materialistic pleasure.

While sweeping generalizations should be avoided, such conclusions become inevitable when one does not find these issues in the agenda of the student union movements. Perhaps this can explain the words of Eugene, a former political prisoner who took us to Robbin Island in the Atlantic Ocean where Nelson Mandela was confined for more than a decade. While we were parting ways after the tour, he whispered, 'This is not the independence for which we went to jail. It is apartheid in another form, perhaps more painful, as it is being inflicted by our own people.'



The Ultimate Goal of Life

Swami Brahmeshananda

FOR a healthy, balanced, and fruitful life it is essential that our goals be clearly decided. Unfortunately, not many people have a clear idea of the purpose of their lives. They are thrown into life, as it were, by circumstances and go on drifting in the direction in which life may take them.

There is a large mass of people living under the poverty line who have to struggle for survival. They are the *jigirshu*, who spend their whole life attempting to make both ends meet. There is another group of people—the *bubhukshu*—who are a little better off; for them the aim of life is sense enjoyment. They earn to spend for their personal enjoyments. A small minority of people—the *chikirshu*—are active and enterprising, and like to work for personal gain and for the welfare of others. A still smaller group is in search of knowledge. They are the *jijnasu*. Their goal is learning. Finally, a rare few—the *mumukshu*—struggle for salvation. In the Bhagavadgita Sri Krishna says that among thousands, one perchance strives for fulfilment; and among such, a rare one attains the highest goal of life.

Guiding Principles

The case of the great spiritual masters of humankind is different. In them we have guides to the highest goal. They were extremely sensitive and introspective, and were not satisfied with the mundane life led by the masses. The inexorable truth of death and suffering did not allow them to rest content; and they became restless to find the higher meaning of life. Prophets and teachers of humanity—like Buddha, Christ, and Mahavira—belong to this category. They have set out in clear terms the ultimate goal of human life, attaining which we can find fulfilment. In the present age, this was done

by Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.

According to Sri Ramakrishna the goal of life is to realize God. He affirms that one can see and talk with God just as one sees and talks with other people. To attain such a state of intimacy with God is, for Sri Ramakrishna, the ultimate purpose of life. Swami Vivekananda has said: 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.' The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, while accepting the goal of God-realization as taught by Sri Ramakrishna, has emphasized the state of desirelessness. If one has to pray for something, one must pray for being free from desires, she said.

For Buddha the goal of life is to go beyond suffering, a state which is also called nirvana. Patanjali states that by controlling the thought waves of one's own mind the Purusha, the conscious entity in us, gets established in its real nature, free from the entanglements of Prakriti, the material world. This, according to him, is the goal.

There appears to be a contradiction in the goals set before us by these great masters. One emphasizes the need to realize God, while the other denies God and asks us to go beyond all suffering. One teacher asks us to search for and manifest the divinity of our soul, whereas another teacher tells us to control our mind. Thus, there appears to be a contradiction in the teachings of these great masters. But, is it really so? Can they not be reconciled? This question is important not only philosophically but also for practical reasons.

A little deeper thought would show us that there is no contradiction in these apparently different aims. They appear different because they have been stated in different contexts. Our experi-

ences are conditioned by the object we attempt to know, by the knower mind, and by the knowledge derived in the process. When Sri Ramakrishna says that the goal of life is to realize God, he is referring to God as the 'object of knowledge'. Swami Vivekananda's statement refers to the individual, the knower, who according to him is potentially divine; for him, the manifestation of that inherent divinity is the goal of life. Sri Sarada Devi as well as Patanjali refer to the mind, the instrument of knowledge, which must be controlled and made desireless. Buddha's approach is thoroughly practical. Without getting into the controversy of the existence of the soul or God, he offers a solution for the universally well-known problem of suffering. Therefore, the goal of life has been set out differently according to the different contexts each teacher dealt with. Individuals are free to choose the context and the teachings that best appeal to their temperament.

Validating the Principles

A few questions still remain to be considered. Will I be able to manifest my divine nature if I control my mind, as advocated by Patanjali? How does manifestation of one's divinity relate to God-realization? And what, after all, is the relation between God-realization and cessation of all suffering or nirvana? If these are mere figures of speech or modes of expression for the same truth, why should these statements be so different? The fact is that they are indeed different modes of expression, but they point to the same goal or purpose of life.

None can see God without controlling the mind or without becoming desireless. 'Manifestation of one's divinity' and 'nirvana' as taught by Buddha actually allude to the same level of achievement. None can realize or 'see' God without manifesting one's own divine nature; and for one who has experienced the direct vision of God, realization of one's real nature and elimination of all suffering follows automatically. In other words, all these different states and experiences are dependant on each other. They are complimentary

and not contradictory. A spiritual aspirant can fully experience this truth only after attaining the ultimate goal of life, whatever be the path he or she chooses. However, even before attaining this highest experience, one can, at least partially, confirm the validity of this interrelationship during one's spiritual journey. Let us try to understand this from the viewpoint of different types of spiritual aspirants.

If, for instance, one has a philosophical and rational bent of mind, one may follow the path of jnana yoga through self-enquiry and discrimination between Self and non-Self. As long as a strong body-consciousness remains, one feels intensely identified with the body; the mind too continues to be restless, and the external world still appears as being real. To the extent one realizes that one is not the body, nor the mind, but essentially an entity that is pure Consciousness, to that extent the mind becomes quiet and the outer world appears less real than before. Finally, the realization of being completely separate from the body-mind complex comes and one experiences the world as being unreal like a dream. Consequently, the mind becomes absolutely calm and desireless.

Perhaps someone interested in raja yoga practises *ashtanga yoga*—the eightfold path of mind control and meditation. As one proceeds onwards on this path, one finds that to the extent one is able to control the mind and make it pure, to that extent, the world starts appearing more and more unreal; then one also realizes one's real nature as Atman, pure Consciousness.

A devotee, earnestly singing and chanting the glories and names of God and gradually approaching the divine Beloved, finds that his or her mind turns calm, while body-consciousness and attachment to material objects decrease. Like the two types of aspirants described above, the devotee also feels that the sorrows and sufferings of life begin to disappear. Thus any sincere spiritual aspirant can experience this interrelatedness of different spiritual paths through a few years of practice.

(Continued on page 649)

Narada Bhakti Sutra

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

27. *Īśvarsyāpyabhimāna-dveṣitvāt dainya-priyatvāt ca.*

*God also hates pride and likes humility;
[hence bhakti is superior].*

NARADA says that Bhagavan likes not pride but *dainya*. *Dainya* is not ordinary humility, which is another form of pride. Real *dainya* means ‘not I, but Thou’. Wherever there is I, God is not. As soon as the ego or ‘I’ is transcended, ‘Thou’ flashes forth. This is *parā bhakti*. The nature of *parā bhakti* totally corresponds with the nature of Bhagavan.

Total destruction of the ego, complete I-lessness, should be the goal of sadhana. The sadhaka should never forget this, hence this exhortation from Narada.

28. *Tasyāḥ jñānameva sādhanam-ityeke.*

According to some, knowledge alone is the means to attain it [bhakti].

Glorification is necessary for inspiration, but being carried away by it, the sadhaka may confuse inspiration with sadhana itself and so may fail to progress. Such a sadhaka gets caught up in *prakāśa*, glory, without going towards the *prakāśaka*, the illuminator, God. So, after praising *parā bhakti*, Narada emphasizes sadhana.

But before beginning your sadhana, you must know what sadhana is. To make the matter clear, he

first takes up some incorrect notions about sadhana and then leads the sadhaka to the correct concept of sadhana by repudiating the former.

There are some sadhakas who, though bhaktas, have an inclination for jnana, philosophical study. This inclination is so strong in them that they think you can’t reach the goal without intellectual knowledge. They say that this alone, *eva*, can give realization; let the bhakta have a clear idea of the Reality. That is why they recommend the study of grammar, Nyaya—the philosophy of the logicians—Sankhya, Vedanta, and so on.

The fallacy in this approach is that here the subject-object duality persists, together with the ego and its attendant dogmatism which God cannot tolerate. Narada says that this attitude—in which there is ‘I’, ‘by’, and ‘only’—is wrong. Get over this ‘I’ and ‘by’ and then only will you come to real sadhana.

29. *Anyonyāśrayatvam-ityanye.*

Others think that the various means are interdependent.

Others have a combination of jnana and bhakti, knowledge and devotion, in their temperament. They apprehend the knowledge of the Reality through their devotion. They believe in philosophical knowledge but they gain it through devotion. For them bhakti is the *āśraya* or abode of jnana, and jnana is the abode of bhakti. They say, ‘The heart is the seat of the mind.’ They also say that you may have devotion, but you must not be emotional or sentimental; you must have the knowledge of the nature of Reality. So they advocate devotional knowledge and knowledge full of devotion.

The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda’s classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur. The classes were conducted between 17 December 1965 and 24 January 1966.

Maya attacks such a devotee at this stage. They think they are egoless and that by such egoless consciousness they will have realization. In fact, there is the ego behind this feeling of egolessness. Sri Ramakrishna has shown this in his lila. Although he was 'sexless', the moment he thought he was 'sexless', the subject-object consciousness appeared in him. Then he decided, 'I shall never say so again.' Similarly the ego appears in such devotees in a most subtle form. Although the position of this sadhaka is better than the previous one, yet there is a subtle subject-object duality and the ego of egolessness in this state. For this reason the sadhaka must give up this consciousness also.

30. *Svayaṁ-phala-rūpateti brahmakumāraḥ.*

Narada says that realization is its own fruit.

Narada says that this is the nature of realization: When the subject-object consciousness is transcended, Brahman flashes forth. There is an impression that Brahman is realized by this transcendental consciousness. But actually it is not so. Brahman is your real nature, and what is already there merely shines forth. When the clouds covering the sun go away, we get the impression that the sun shines because the clouds are removed. But the removal of the clouds did not create the sun, it was already there shining.

When a hypnotized person is de-hypnotized, nothing new happens; only the mistaken identity goes away. But we say, 'He became himself again.' When the *bhrama* or mistake goes away, what is already there remains. So there is nothing like: 'by this' one 'shall realize God'. The sadhaka should know that neither 'by' knowledge nor 'by' jnana and bhakti combined can one realize God. Ignorance is not an object, though we get the impression of the ignorance going away and realization dawning. Hence realization appears to be an 'effect'. But there is neither cause nor effect in this. Bhakti is like a fruit in itself, *svayaṁ phalarūpā*. It is itself the cause and itself the effect. It is really our own Self. This Self appears as the sadhaka, the sadhana,

and also as *siddhi*, realization. The whole process is nothing but lila—the dance of Brahman. So Gaudapada says in the *Mandukya Karika*: 'There is neither bondage nor liberation.' It is all lila. He manifests himself.

31. *Raja-gr̥ha-bhojanādiṣu tathaiva dṛṣṭatvāt.*

For it is seen to be so in the case of the king, the home, and the dinner.

This is explained in the next aphorism.

32. *Na tena rājā-paritoṣaḥ kṣudhāśāntir-va.*

By that, the king does not become king, nor does the wayfarer derive satisfaction, nor is the hungry person appeased.

Narada illustrates this *svayaṁ phalarūpatā*. When a prince brought up as a hermit comes to know his parentage, the prince-consciousness flashes forth from within him. It is not produced 'by' anything. A wayfarer reaches home and is happy. The home is not created by his return, nor is the *paritoṣa*, satisfaction. It just flashes from within. Food appears to satisfy a hungry man. Actually, contentment is already there in the physical system. It was disturbed by hunger. This obstruction is removed by food, and the innate satisfaction flashes forth by itself.

Similarly, God or Bhagavan is already there. The mistake is not reality; otherwise it would never go. 'Disappearance of maya' is something relative. So when the 'I' and 'mine'—which do not allow the sadhaka to realize God, one's real nature—go away, then Bhagavan is seen as 'the all'.

33. *Tasmāt saiva grāhyā mumukṣubhiḥ.*

Therefore, that highest spiritual realization alone is worthy of acceptance by one desirous of liberation.

Narada says: Destroy the 'I' and 'mine', and God, who is your real nature, will manifest himself. Anyone seeking liberation should simply transcend the ego, instead of doing this or that.

(To be continued)

Light on Patanjali – V

Swami Sarvagatananda

De-hypnotizing Ourselves

UNFORTUNATELY we are all hypnotized. We don't know what we are in reality; we identify ourselves with so many things according to our knowledge, experience and environment, and the way we were brought up. At the same time we do not know what the Ground looks like, what the pure Self is. We have to undo whatever we have learnt; completely remove from our own being whatever we are now identifying with. The greatest difficulty is to make innocuous the already imprinted thoughts and ideas. The truth is none of them are sticking to us, none of them is interfering with our true nature. They are all just like clouds, reducing the amount of light shining through, but the light above the clouds—like that of the sun—is still bright, in all its glory.

These impressions are so powerful—just a sound, one word, is sufficient to tip us off, to make us lose our ground and to make us behave like lunatics. Even though we are thoughtful, intelligent beings, when it comes to our life, we are helpless. With all our intelligence, with all our scientific knowledge, we don't understand our present situation because we are so deeply rooted in and so coloured by our impressions, superimpositions, attachments, aversions. We identify ourselves with all these impressions and think that we are [structured] according to them. But really speaking: Were they born with us? No. When did they come? How did they come?

When we analyse: 'Yes, there was a situation which brought on the ideas, the identifications, and

now I identify with them.' As they came so they will go. If we are not one with the thoughts, then why should we identify ourselves with them and make ourselves miserable? We know this logically but not emotionally. Reason tells us it is all true but when it comes to the emotions, we are lost.

What we need is strong will power, conviction, so as to neutralize all these identifications. To de-hypnotize ourselves we need to be well grounded spiritually.

It is true that all religious teachers, without exception, are telling us in one voice that the kingdom of God is within us, that the Atman is within us, that all these superimpositions are temporal. But in the name of the gods, the evolved souls, we kill each other; we identify ourselves with those creeds and we do the worst things. That is why human life is not based on reasoning, not on logic. We use logic to explain things but we live by emotions, sentiments, associations. All these drag us down to commit the worst things. We don't stop and think: 'Was it true, is it true, will it be true?'

Patanjali brings the concept of Ishwara, God, as there must be something on which you can put your mind, focus your mind, to remove all superimpositions, attachments, aversions, associations. To draw the mind from all of them you need a greater force—God is the greatest force.

If we have any faith, any devotion to God, we can gain ground. Patanjali explains what is meant by 'Ishwara': He is the Supreme Being, untouched by all these dual throngs of miseries, is beyond attachments and desires, is absolutely pure.

Ishwara and Devotion

Here Patanjali throws in a very important word,

The text is a compilation of minimally edited extracts from the author's book *Meditation as Spiritual Culmination: Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (Boston: Vedanta Society of Massachusetts, 2005). The book is a transcript of the author's lectures on raja yoga, delivered between September 1977 and June 1981, at Boston.

which is not part of Sankhya philosophy. Yogis believe in Ishwara. 'Ishwara' means 'God'; let us use the word 'God' because there is no better word. 'God' is the only word we can use, but we can define this word more carefully. That is, the word 'Ishwara' means a spiritual being in so far as we are concerned. He who has identified himself with that spiritual Ground is called Ishwara. Why? The term *ish* means 'to rule'; 'Ishwara' means that 'which rules'. What is that which rules your being, your whole personality? The Ground—it is neither matter nor mind—the spirit rules.

It is pure Consciousness that rules our being. My whole personality depends upon that Consciousness; I may be very strong, very powerful, very intelligent—remove the Consciousness, what happens? I am nobody. Just as when one unplugs a huge machine, what happens? That is what is happening. That is the Ground. Consciousness is the Ground—non-material, non-mental, spiritual. The Spirit, Ishwara, is the ground of our being, that which rules the entire personality.

Raja yoga does not believe in the abstract, absolute, unrelated, transcendental kind of Ishwara—not Ishwara in that way, but in a relative sense. It is not the Heavenly Father, it is the Son; it is not Allah but the Prophet; it is not Brahman but Bhagavan. Therefore, it is the relative aspect of the Absolute, the manifestation from the point of divine Ground, that incarnation, that saint, that sage, who has lifted his consciousness, who has touched this very Ground, who has identified himself with the Ruling Force, is called Ishwara.

By devotion to him one can also attain to that state. Why? How does it help? If you study bhakti yoga by Swami Vivekananda or bhakti yoga of any school, there you discover that when you are devoted to that, you become that. Devotion is dynamic, be devoted to anything, gradually you approach it, and you become that.

In all our arts it is devotion that is needed: I must be devoted to that cause. If I want to be a musician, I must be devoted to that art. The more I am devoted, the more I get perfection in that. In any field, if you

are devoted, you identify yourself with that.

When you are devoted to any god, that devotion draws you to the divine Ground and you become one with it. Patanjali tells you that this devotion also helps you to gain purity; it helps you keep your mind away from all other things. When you are devoted to a cause, you come away from everything else.

How do I know that I am devoted to music? When I don't care for anything else, I just sit at the instrument and practise; when a thousand people call, I say that I have no time for anything else. That is, when you are devoted to a thing, you come away from every other thing.

So also when you are devoted to God, you come away from all other things. You move away from them because they do not attract you, they do not bind you, the mind does not go there. The object of devotion arrests you completely; that is how the great devotees gained illumination, because devotion drew them.



(Continued from page 645)

This unity of ultimate realization and interrelatedness of spiritual techniques has an important practical application. If bhakti helps in controlling thought waves, why should I not combine it with other methods of concentration and meditation? Similarly, why should the devotee not also practise self-introspection and discrimination between Self and non-Self? These too will add to bhakti. Again, an aspirant following the path of discrimination—jnana yoga—can also fortify the practice of discrimination between Self and non-Self with devotion and the practice of concentration and meditation. Such aspirants would then proceed faster towards the goal. As Swami Vivekananda has said: 'The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.' We may do it by one or more means, but it would be best to do it with a synthesis of all the four, because then all our faculties—intellectual, emotional, physical, and psychic—would be maximally utilized.



Albert Einstein: A Humane Scientist

Swami Tathagatananda

Reason, of course, is weak, when measured against its never-ending task. Weak, indeed, compared with the follies and passions of mankind, which, we must admit, almost entirely control our human destinies, in great things and small. Yet the works of the understanding outlast the noisy bustling generations and spread light and warmth across the centuries.

—Albert Einstein¹

ALBERT Einstein was instinctively otherworldly. Anyone who studies his great life in depth must appreciate his humane personality apart from his intellectual brilliance, though both the aspects were harmonized in him. He was always humane in his dealings with others, even when he was misunderstood.

Spiritual Impression of the Great Mahatma

Einstein was greatly inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's moral stature. He once called Gandhi the 'greatest man of our age'² and described him as follows:

A leader of his people, unsupported by any outward authority: a politician whose success rests not upon craft nor the mastery of technical devices, but simply on the convincing power of his personality; a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force; a man of wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and the betterment of their lot; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times risen superior.

Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.³

Einstein's dedication to truthfulness was very

similar to Gandhi's. The occasional pang of conscience regarding a moral issue remained with him for a long time. Like Gandhi, Einstein dedicated himself to the work of his chosen path. It is well known that science was Einstein's refuge in times of difficulty and sorrow, and that from youth he was proficient in his study and work habits. In his early days at the patent office, he performed his patent investigations so efficiently that he was left with a few hours of free time. Rather than socialize or fritter away these precious hours, he spent them writing down his calculations and research on scraps of paper. He quickly hid those notes in a nearby drawer whenever he heard someone approaching. This action bothered his conscience even after he became famous and he continued to feel remorseful about it.

During the years of Senator Joseph McCarthy's Communist witch-hunts in the United States (1950–1954), Einstein, along with many other influential individuals, was suspected of communist leanings. Outraged by President Truman's announcement in 1950 that the US had built a hydrogen bomb, Einstein made a brief statement about the arms race that was aired on the premiere of the Sunday night television show, 'Today with Mrs Roosevelt'.⁴ He said: 'Each step appears as the inevitable consequence of the one that went before. And at the end, looming ever clearer, lies general annihilation. ... The loyalty of citizens, particularly civil servants, is carefully supervised by a police force growing more powerful every day. People of independent thought are harassed' (ibid.).

His words had a terrific impact. The *New York Post* ran a headline the next day, 'Einstein Warns World: Outlaw H-Bomb or Perish'. FBI director J Edgar Hoover ordered a special investigation of

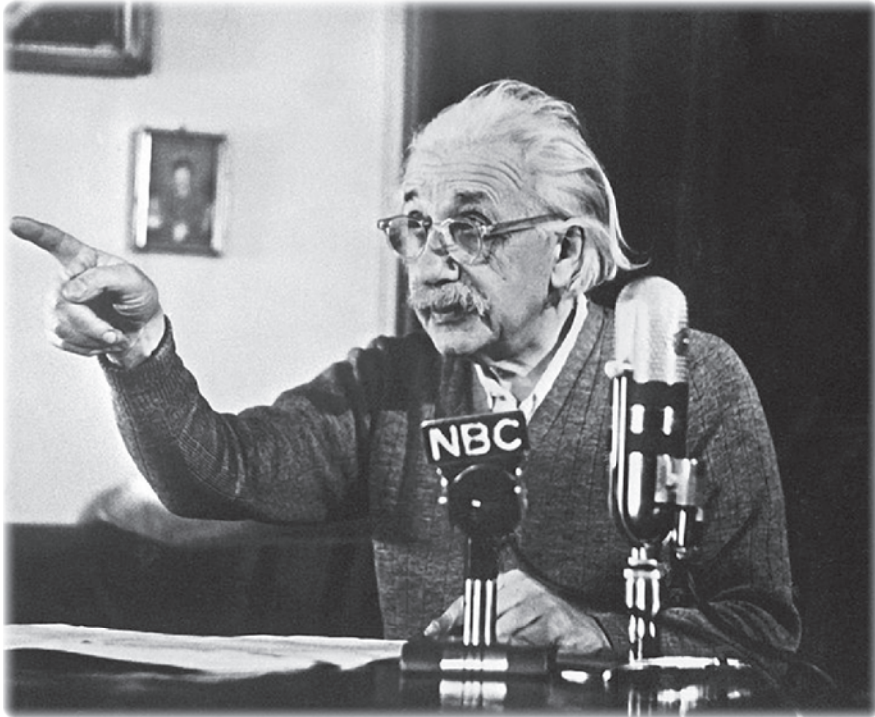
Einstein's loyalty to America and his possible connections to communism (*ibid.*). During this period, Einstein wrote to a Brooklyn schoolteacher embroiled in the McCarthy hearings on the influence of communism in American high schools. In his letter, written from his sickbed on 16 May, 1953, Einstein put forward the view, which he shared with Gandhi, that the pure and powerful approach of non-cooperation is best:

Frankly, I can only see the revolutionary way of non-cooperation in the sense of Gandhi's. Every intellectual who is called before one of the committees ought to refuse to testify, i.e. he must be prepared for jail and economic ruin, in short, for the sacrifice of his personal welfare in the interest of the cultural welfare of his country. ... This refusal to testify must [be based] on the assertion that it is shameful for a blameless citizen to submit to such an inquisition and that this kind of inquisition violates the spirit of the Constitution.

If enough people are ready to take this grave step they will be successful. If not, then the intellectuals of this country deserve nothing better than the slavery that is intended for them.⁵

This attitude was consistent with Einstein's fundamental belief in the moral principle of freedom of thought. He gave the teacher permission to make his comments public if he wished, and the *New York Times* and *Time* published them that June.

Ease and happiness were not his goals in life, nor was he a materialist in the popular sense. 'A life directed chiefly toward the fulfilment of personal desires will sooner or later always lead to bitter disappointment,' he said.⁶ 'The banal goals of human strivings—possessions, superficial success, luxury—have always seemed contemptible to me' (305). He fully understood that instinct is stronger than intellect—that our impulsive nature, rooted in a sense-bound life, forms shackles of material



Albert Einstein declares his opposition to the atomic bomb and to the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union in a press conference at Princeton on 14 February 1950

bondage which do not allow us to develop a cosmic outlook free from egotism. In his credo, 'What I Believe,' he wrote:

I am absolutely convinced that no amount of wealth in the world can help humanity forward, even in the hands of the most dedicated worker in this cause. The example of great and pure personalities can lead us to noble deeds and views. Money only appeals to selfishness, and, without fail, it tempts its owner to abuse it. Can anyone imagine Moses, Jesus, or Gandhi with the moneybags of Carnegie? (305).

Idealism

If an opportunity arose, Einstein would speak of his cardinal principles. When he is speaking about himself, his words reveal an idealistic temperament, coupled with humility, simplicity, and total lack of vanity:

I am happy because I want nothing from anyone. I don't care for money. Decorations, titles or distinctions mean nothing to me. I don't crave praise. The only thing that gives me pleasure, apart from my work, my violin and my sailing boat, is the appreciation of my fellow-workers. I claim credit for

nothing. I have no special gifts—I am only passionately curious.⁷

Indeed, he lived that life all through. He wrote:

The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life.

To make this a living force and bring it to clear consciousness is perhaps the foremost task of education.

The foundation of morality should not be made dependent on myth nor tied to any authority, lest doubt about the myth or about the legitimacy of the authority imperil the foundation of sound judgment and action.⁸

In the second-storey office of his home at 112 Mercer Street, Princeton, three portraits had always been kept within view—those of Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell, and Newton. Later a fourth graced his wall: that of Mahatma Gandhi. Einstein felt that this universally respected individual was ‘the only statesman who represented that higher conception of human relation in the political sphere to which we must aspire with all our powers’. Earlier, Einstein had also hung Gandhi’s portrait in his office at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin.⁹

Magnanimity and Concern for Others

Einstein was magnanimous almost to a fault. He gave generously, to his colleagues and students of his time, money and efforts. ‘Solicitude for man and his future must always be the main interest of all technical efforts; never forget this in the midst of your diagrams and equations,’ he once remarked. He often summed up his own efforts thus: ‘Only a life lived for others is worthwhile.’¹⁰ He said this hundreds of times. His concern was always compassionately directed to the needy.

Einstein’s remarks in the epigraph to this article were more than mere idealistic sentiments to him. He lived up to his ideals and did his best to pass them on to others. A poor, thirty-two-year-

old bachelor in India had come to realize that his sole interest in life was scientific research in mathematics and physics. From early youth his impoverished family life had deprived him from following his dream through education. He had no solid foundation in either of these subjects and was ‘terribly weak’ in them. In spite of having to work to support his family, he was absolutely dedicated to his ideal. When he lost his job, he wrote to Einstein hoping to get financial aid from him, in order to dedicate his life to research.

Einstein was deeply touched by the letter and the young man’s courage in writing and seeking his help. His lengthy reply written in English two years before his death reflects his abiding humility. In his sober words we see his humanity and level-headedness graciously enveloped in a sense of reality and a noble work ethic. Whatever our field of interest, his higher values and practical advice encourage us:

I received your letter and was impressed by your ardent wish to study physics. I must confess, however, that I can in no way agree with your attitude. We are all nourished and housed by the work of our fellow-men and we have to pay honestly for it not only by work chosen for the sake of our inner satisfaction but by work which, according to general opinion, serves them. Otherwise one becomes a parasite however modest our wants might be. This is the more so in your country where the work of educated persons is doubly needed in this time of struggle for economic improvement.

This is one side of the matter. But there is another side to it which would have to be considered also in the case that you would have ample means to choose freely what to do. In striving to do scientific work the chance—even for very gifted persons—to achieve something of real value is very little, so that it would always be a great probability that you would feel frustrated when the age of optimal working capacity has passed.

There is only one way out: Give most of your time to some practical work as a teacher or in another field which agrees with your nature, and spend the rest of it for study. So you will be able, in any case, to lead a normal and harmonious life even without the special blessings of the Muses.¹¹

He had a reputation for generosity, giving to all and sundry of his precious time and modest income. He quietly encouraged and assisted others in his field, especially refugees who depended on his pledge of support for obtaining a visa when the United States had made it even harder for them to emigrate.¹² He gave out professional affidavits so frequently that 'refugee scientists arriving at Oxford in 1933 and proudly showing a written testimonial from Einstein were often advised to keep quiet about it'. This advice did not matter to them—they understood the sincerity of his motives and treasured his encouragement and helpfulness. On 3 October 1933 Einstein spoke at London's Royal Albert Hall to raise funds on behalf of displaced German scholars (423).

'Personal matters,' Bertrand Russell once observed of Einstein, 'never occupied more than odd nooks and crannies in his thoughts.'¹³ A personal matter, however, was often associated with a noble cause. He spoke boldly in public as a representative of a committee concerned about the menace of Germany's rearmament. His public appeals and private discussions with Winston Churchill and other key individuals in support of aiding refugee scholars from Nazi Germany illustrate his personal commitment to broad, vital issues.

'Manifesto to the Civilized World'

During World War I, Germany's war policies violated Belgium's neutrality with devastating after-effects. To justify their actions, the Germans drafted the 'Manifesto to the Civilized World', (also called 'Appeal to the Cultured World').¹⁴ In this manifesto, they denied allegations of German military attacks on civilians in Belgium and excused their aggression in that country on the grounds of Germany's blameless defence of German national culture—a culture blatantly militaristic. The words in the manifesto hinted at the violent undercurrent and paranoia of German nationalism at that time: 'Were it not for German militarism, German culture would have been wiped off the face of the earth. We shall wage this fight to the very end as a

cultured nation, a nation that holds the legacy of Goethe, Beethoven, and Kant no less sacred than hearth and home' (207).

Published in October 1914, this proclamation became known as 'The Manifesto of the 93' because it was signed by ninety-three prominent German intellectuals, including Max Planck, Walther Nernst, and Fritz Haber (*ibid.*). In a concerted effort to raise money for Germany's military needs, the most popular of these intellectuals circulated the manifesto widely, strengthening its effect.

Fortunately, because he was a citizen of Switzerland, a neutral country, Einstein was never asked to sign the manifesto. He would never have signed it anyway—his deeply rooted pacifism forbade him from participating in such an action. A letter to his cherished friend Paul Ehrenfest in Holland reflects his level-headedness: 'Europe in her insanity has started something unbelievable. In such times, one realizes to what a sad species of animal one belongs. I quietly pursue my peaceful studies and contemplations and feel only pity and disgust.'¹⁵

Einstein's Worthy Reply

Einstein did more than write to his friend Ehrenfest. According to Professor Georg Nicolai, he at once rallied to Nicolai's side and helped him draft a pacifist response to the ugly implications of the German manifesto. Nicolai called it 'Manifesto to the Europeans'. It was an appeal to the scholars of all the warring nations to unify themselves under the banner of a 'League of Europeans'. This organization, if formed, would serve to protect the world from the German menace.¹⁶ Only Einstein, Nicolai, and two other supporters dared to sign this counter-manifesto, which pointed out that, '[t]hey [the authors of "The Manifesto to the Civilized World"] have spoken in a hostile spirit. Nationalist passions cannot excuse this attitude, which is unworthy of what the world has heretofore called culture.'¹⁷

Einstein's pacifism had assumed a voice. From Berlin, he vehemently attacked German nationalism and patriotism. 'I would rather be hacked into pieces,' he said, 'than take part in such an

abominable business.' In his days of youthful idealism nearly two decades before, Einstein had turned his back on his Judaic traditions. Now, he realized that if he were to help the Jews whose violent persecution had escalated dramatically, he needed to embrace Judaism. In October 1915, he wrote 'My Opinion on the War', a three-page essay in which he equated patriotism with the worst aggressive animal instincts. Berlin's Goethe League published it that same month (207–8). 'The psychological roots of war', he wrote in his essay, 'lie in a biologically based, aggressive peculiarity of the human being.'

With the end of the First World War, Einstein's pacifist spirit was revived by his observation of the horrible wake of suffering that swept over humanity. During the 1920s, before Hitler and the Nazis rose to power, his pacifism grew in conviction and strength. He had long resisted war with every fibre in his body; now he was convinced of the need for total—not partial or limited—disarmament. In 1925, he joined H G Wells, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore in signing a manifesto against forced military conscription.¹⁸

Forging an Important Friendship

A great benefit came to Einstein when he was in Belgium, which was also the location of the Solvay Congresses (Brussels). In 1930, partly due to his involvement in these congresses, Einstein was presented to Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, who was married to King Albert I. He and the queen became good friends and developed a bond of mutual understanding. Their friendship was remarkable. They loved music and played Mozart together. He enjoyed having tea and explaining relativity to her. In a letter to Elsa, he wrote, "These two simple people are of a purity and goodness that is seldom to be found."¹⁹ A year later, he was invited again to the royal palace and dined alone with the king and queen. Einstein recalled it with evident pleasure: 'No servants, vegetarian, spinach with fried egg and potatoes. I liked it enormously, and I am sure that the feeling is mutual' (ibid.). From the time of his arrival in Belgium, he began writing to the queen, sharing with her some

of his inmost thoughts that he had not disclosed to others. When her husband and daughter-in-law died years later, the queen was overcome with sorrow. Einstein wrote to console her, urging her to think of the coming springtime and grasp the beauty of the new life it promised of 'something eternal that lies beyond the reach of the hand of fate and of all human delusions.'²⁰

(To be concluded)

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Girish and the Monastic Disciples of Ramakrishna

Swami Chetanananda

GIRISHCHANDRA Ghosh was much older than most of the monastic disciples of Ramakrishna; only Swami Advaitananda was his senior. But despite their youth, Girish had deep respect for his monastic brethren. The scriptures say, *guruvat guru-putreshu*—respect the son of a guru like the guru. Girish loved these monastic children of the Master as he did his own guru. For their part, the monks revered Girish immensely. They held him in high esteem because they had seen how the Master loved him and how he had changed Girish's life. So the householders and the monks enjoyed a wonderful brotherly relationship, as was clear in how they interacted.

The monastic disciples sometimes teased Girish: 'You write and perform as prompted by your own desires, and yet you claim that the Master gave you the task of saving the fallen people of the world. Don't you feel ashamed to talk like that?' But Girish would boldly reply: 'Wait, brothers! When I meet Sri Ramakrishna again I shall tell him that I won't act in the role of a villain any more. The next time let his monastic disciples play the villains and I shall act the part of a noble character.' Girish truly believed that the Master brought different types of devotees to the world to play specific roles in his divine drama.¹

Faith is the first step in spiritual life. This working faith gradually turns into complete faith. Thus faith is the means and faith becomes the end. Girish's spiritual journey centred on faith. He believed wholeheartedly that one can attain God through faith alone and no other spiritual disciplines are necessary. He observed that the devotees of the Master first developed firm faith in their guru and then performed meditation and auster-

ities to obtain higher spiritual experiences. This behaviour confused Girish and he sometimes argued with them.

Although Girish was respectful to his monastic brothers, he questioned their spiritual practices:

Well brothers, sometimes I hear you lament that you have not achieved anything, and sometimes I see you run to the mountains and fast there for something—but I really don't understand why. Also, I notice that you seem to be even more convinced than I am that the Master is an incarnation of God. This really amazes me. You must perceive something higher about the Master than I do, and for that reason you are trying to attain full realization of whatever that is. Fortunately, after studying mesmerism and hypnotism, I concluded that I did not trust Ramakrishna to give me a strange or supernatural vision, which would put me into an ocean of confusion. If the Master had given me a vision, I would have thought that he had somehow hypnotized me, and thus cheated me. If that had been the case, I am sure it would have been difficult for me to hold onto the faith that the Master is an incarnation of God. I know you want to have spiritual visions. In addition, you believe that the Master is an incarnation of God! Perhaps you are great receptacles, so you can harmonize those contradictory ideas. So I console my mind: 'That is not your path. Don't try to see that supernatural stuff.' But I have such faith that if I have a fancy to attain bhava, a vision, or samadhi, I will forcefully demand those from the Master, and he will immediately impart those to me by his power (363–4).

The monastic disciples of the Master were overwhelmed by Girish's simple, steady, and one-pointed devotion to the Master. In his later years, Girish came to understand that his monastic

brothers visited holy places and performed spiritual practices in order to reconcile the Master's words, the scriptures, and their own visions and experiences.

After his youngest son's death, Girish temporarily withdrew himself from the theatre and spent most of his time with the Master's monastic disciples. It brought him tremendous joy to talk with them about the divine glory and infinite grace of the Master. His passionate devotion to his guru made him forget time and space, hunger and thirst, grief and pain. One day Swami Niranjanananda went to Girish and said: 'If the Master made you a sannyasin, then why are you living at home? Let us go to the monastery.' Girish responded: 'I am ready to do whatever you say, considering your words to be those of the Master. But I have no power to become a monk by my own will, because I have given my power of attorney to the Master.'

Swami Niranjanananda: 'Then I say, please renounce everything and come this moment.' Without a second thought, Girish left home, barefooted, wearing a single cloth. However, when he arrived at the monastery the other disciples realized that it would be hard for Girish to live on alms, as he had lived a comfortable life for many years. They also did not think it was necessary for a staunch devotee like him to ruin his health by leading an itinerant life. They convinced Girish to change his mind and then advised him to visit Kamarpukur and Jayrambati with Niranjanananda. Girish accepted their advice, considering it as coming from the Master (355-6).

Sometimes Girish would visit the monastic disciples of Ramakrishna when they were living at Alambazar Monastery. As one hemp smoker loves another, so the monks were excited when Girish visited them to talk about the Master. To make their renunciation more fervent, the disciples would sometimes perform a special fire worship ceremony or *homa*. While pouring oblations into the flames, they would imagine all of their desires being burnt into ashes. They did not, however, allow any householder devotees to be present during these ceremonies.

After Girish's second wife and his young son died, the monks gave him permission to attend one of their *homa* ceremonies. He observed the ceremony, and when the monks poured their oblations into the fire, Girish got up and poured his own oblations, imagining that his past *samskaras* and desires were being burnt. Afterwards, Girish sat silently absorbed in his own thoughts. Suddenly he became extremely excited and began talking about the Master's love and compassion. Then his mood changed; he stopped talking and became grave. Without disturbing his mood, the disciples continued to talk about the Master's divine life. Only one monk took notice when Girish got up and spat on the ashes of the *homa* altar three times. He then came back and began to talk about the Master with doubled enthusiasm.

Later, that monk privately asked Girish why he had done such a strange and blasphemous thing. Surprised, Girish said to him: 'Oh, you saw that? Listen, brother, while I was talking about the Master, I realized that he had not asked me to perform a *homa* ritual. I did it out of my own will; I dared to pour some ghee into the fire in order to get rid of my *samskaras* and desires. I have become guilty of having faith in the fire god and in myself rather than in the Master. Alas! Why, I thought, did I have such a foolish idea? I fervently prayed to the Master, confessed my misdeed, and begged his forgiveness. But this rascal mind is so mischievous! It directed my attention to all of you, and said: "You should not feel guilty for pouring oblations. Look, your monastic brothers do not feel that way; rather they are feeling great spiritual bliss." Then my divine conscience arose within me by the Master's grace and made me understand that my brothers were performing that ritual according to the behest of the Master, so they were not wrong. But the Master had not asked me to do that, so this is why I felt guilty for performing it.'

'Then I mentally bowed down to you again and again; and a terrible repugnance arose in my mind towards those ashes as a result of my misdeed. At that time it was as if someone forced me to spit on

the altar, and this gave me peace. Brother, don't be upset about my strange behaviour. In that way I scorned my bad judgement and action. Please have mercy on your weak brother and bless me that I may not commit the error of following you again.'

When the other monks heard Girish's story, they did not blame him at all; rather they said that this indicated he had wholeheartedly taken refuge in the Master (367-9).

Swami Brahmananda

Girish told the following story about Swami Brahmananda's extraordinary spiritual power:

Compared to myself, Rakhal [Swami Brahmananda] is only a young boy. I know that the Master regarded him as his spiritual son, but that is not the only reason I respect him. Once I was suffering from asthma and various kinds of ailments. As a result, my body became very weak and I lost faith in Sri Ramakrishna. With a view to getting rid of that dry spell, I engaged pandits to read the Gita and the Chandi to me. But still I had no peace of mind. Some brother disciples came to see me, and I told them about the unhappy state of my mind, but they only kept silent. Then one day Rakhal came and asked me, 'How are you?' I replied: 'Brother, I am in hell. Can you tell me the way out?' Rakhal listened to me and then burst into laughter. 'Why worry about it?' said he. 'As the waves of the ocean rise high, then go down again, and again rise, so does the mind. Don't be upset. Your present mood is due to the fact that it will lead you to a higher realm of spirituality. The wave of the mind is gathering strength.' As soon as Rakhal left my house, my doubt and dryness disappeared and I got back my faith and devotion.²

Swami Saradananda

Girish could not bear hypocrisy. One day he told Saradananda (Sharat) the following story:

Look Sharat, my brother Atul had a daughter who was ill. Atul brought a monk from somewhere and arranged for him to stay in our shrine annex. That fellow would enjoy our food and give some medicine to my niece. I didn't object because it

was his [Atul's] daughter. One afternoon I could not bear it any more. I saw that no one was around. I then quietly went to the monk and said: 'Well, holy man, I understand you give medicine to sick people. But do you know that you have a terrible worldly disease [that is, desire for money and fame]? Why don't you focus on curing your own disease?' Saying this I quickly and quietly returned to my room so that nobody could see me. The monk left the next day.³

Once Girish asked Swami Vivekananda to write a biography of Ramakrishna. But Swamiji declined, saying that he was incapable of doing this. He said, 'Shall I make the image of a monkey while trying to make that of Shiva?' On another occasion Swamiji said, 'Sharat will write.' Later, after Swamiji's passing, Girish asked Saradananda to write about Ramakrishna's divine life, his sadhana, and his message. He feared that in the future some less knowledgeable people might present the Master in a narrow, incorrect way. This might eventually lead to the creation of a cult and defeat the purpose of his incarnation. There was cause for such apprehension: It was well known that Girish had given his power of attorney to the Master, who took complete responsibility for him. Later some people started imitating Girish, but they only deceived themselves because they did not understand the importance of self-surrender.

Saradananda started working on *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* (Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play), first writing 'Sri Ramakrishna as a Guru', which became the third and fourth parts of that book. In the beginning of the third part, Saradananda explained the mystery of the 'power of attorney' that the Master had accepted from Girish. Before publication, Saradananda read the chapter to Girish, who wholeheartedly approved it.⁴

Mahendranath Datta wrote: 'One day at noon Sharat Maharaj and I went to Girish's house in Bagh-bazar. He had just finished his lunch and was beginning to smoke his hubble-bubble while reclining on a bolster. We sat near him. Girish's *Vilwamangal* was then the talk of the town. Sharat Maharaj asked:

“Well, Vilwamangal left Chintamani out of renunciation. Then why did he become infatuated again with the wife of the merchant? Once one has renunciation, how can one’s mind again come to a lower plane?”

‘Girish replied with a smile: “Look, Sharat, you are young; you have not properly understood the plot. A man develops initial renunciation on the spur of the moment or because of a little excitement—this is not real renunciation. Vilwamangal left home and Chintamani in the beginning; that was raw renunciation. That excitement diminished when he faced suffering. Then his past habits and memories returned vigorously. During this period some people return home to their old habits. At that time if he comes in contact with a real guru, his mind again realizes the transitoriness of the world and he develops real renunciation. This renunciation is permanent and does not come from momentary excitement. It leads to the attainment of God. Initial renunciation comes from anger or worldly suffering; it has no relation with God. For that reason, in the beginning of *Vilwamangal*, I showed a lot of commotion and a wave of excitement; but after getting a second blow, Vilwamangal developed passion for God. He then became silent and outwardly calm. He sincerely longed for God. His mouth stopped and his heart began to speak. Such things happen in the lives of spiritual aspirants.” We were dumbfounded, and we realized how deeply Girish understood human character.’⁵

One day Girish told Swami Saradananda the following story concerning his maidservant:

In 1869 there was an epidemic of dengue fever in Calcutta. All members of our household were in bed with body-ache and fever. Our maidservant was doing all the work and she was very upset. While sweeping with a broom, she was grumbling: ‘O hopeless God, I would like to beat you with this broom. You have given fever to all and they are comfortably lying in bed. And I am continuously working from morning onward. You don’t think of me at all. I would like to beat you with this broom seven times.’ Saying so, she hit the broom seven times on the floor. After a while, she said, ‘Let me lie down and take a little rest.’ As soon as

she lay down, she contracted fever and body-ache. She then began to chide God: ‘O unfortunate one, you were waiting to lend an ear to my words. The moment I asked for fever, you immediately gave it to me. When I pray for so many good things, you put cotton in your ears and do not listen. You only listen to the bad prayers. Well, let me get well, and I shall beat you again.’ We listened to her complain to God and smiled from our beds (54–5).

Girish was very fond of the Master’s monastic disciples. Once when he invited Saradananda to have lunch with him, the cook was late in serving the meal. Girish began to show the swami how two big tomcats fight for food: He lay down on his stomach, raised his face up, and began to snatch the imaginary food from the floor with his right hand. From time to time he opened his mouth and cried, ‘*mao, mao, mao!*’ Girish’s mimicry was so perfect that Saradananda laughed heartily (113–14).

Every afternoon many people visited Girish, as he was a great entertainer and a wonderful host. He also had encyclopedic knowledge. While drinking tea, he would talk about science, history, and Ramakrishna. Saradananda quite often would join him at that time. If someone disagreed with Girish, he would say with due respect, ‘Whatever you say is all right, but there is more to say about it.’ Saradananda learned this technique from Girish. Saradananda would also say: ‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are ever dreamt of in your philosophy’ (178–80).

(To be concluded)

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



The Bhagavad Gītā from a Different Perspective

Dr K Ramachandran

Suvarnarekha, MF 4-109 Vrindavan Gardens, PO Pattom Palace, Thiruvananthapuram 695 004. 2006. xiv + 333 pp. Rs 200.

As the title rightly says, Dr Ramachandran's book is different in many ways. The Bhagavadgita has had any number of commentators, but few have concentrated 'comprehensively' on its social dynamics. Even those who explored these dynamics rarely concede(d) the positive elements of this text, rightly hailed as the most systematic statement of perennial philosophy. But Dr Ramachandran does. He is intensely aware of the enduring core of the text. He also comments on each verse from his own perspective besides presenting the views of the other commentators—from Shankara to Winthrop Sargeant and beyond—without cynically discrediting or condescendingly taking cognizance of their views. He maintains a balance which is, by and large, rare.

In a detailed introduction he says: 'Poor understanding of the various systems that Bhagavad Gītā was trying to integrate has led some Western critics to discount Bhagavad Gītā as a "Mumbo Jumbo". It will be equally foolish to try to justify every word that is said in the Bhagavad Gītā, saying that it came from God and, therefore, is not questionable. The best way to understand Bhagavad Gītā is to see it in the socio-political, spiritual and philosophical background in which it was created, see the contradictions and be bold enough to point out what is not acceptable.' In short, Dr Ramachandran sets out to demystify and de-deify the text. But the text also 'embodies a sensitive mind caught in the agonizing present, looking for solace and redemption in modern revelations of the time old treatise'.

Dr Ramachandran's own intolerable experience as a victim of the caste system gives authenticity to whatever point he argues. He is also aware that human folly can distort any text, particularly

a scripture, to its own ends. Therefore, truth is not unilateral: 'Bhagavad Gītā did not endorse casteism and untouchability but left some loopholes here and there, enough for the casteist Hindus to infiltrate and hijack Bhagavad Gītā and hold Hinduism as a hostage for a long time.' Moreover, 'nobody does a *psychological testing* at birth and then classifies that person to that particular *varna*.' So Dr Ramachandran suggests that *varna* is 'just a game'.

This underscores one basic quality of Dr Ramachandran's study: he has neither critics to please nor public to appease. Few will, for instance, take on the interpretations of, say, Swami Chinmayananda and assert that the swami was 'trying to justify an unjustifiable statement' from the Gita. It is identification of the *chaturvarnya* schema—the division of society into four *varnas*—with the caste hierarchy that Dr Ramachandran contests. As he tersely argues: 'If one makes a list of all the items mentioned in Chapters XIV, XV and XVIII and then try [*sic*] to compartmentalize people into the four classes of *cāturvarnya*, one will be surprised to see that there will only be a handful of people who really qualify to be a Brāhmin in the whole India.'

But this fact the saints and sages knew. The bhakti movement tried to decentre, if not totally deconstruct, caste. And in our own times Sri Ramakrishna, the radiant exemplar of lived spirituality, always said and acted upon the affirmation that 'devotees do not belong to any caste'. Lest the word 'caste' sound pejorative, he clarified that there is a vital distinction between 'the rice and plantain-bundling brahmana' and the knower of Brahman. Perhaps, Indic systems are built on the conviction that every 'version' has a built-in 'subversion', so that the version does not slide into 'perversion'.

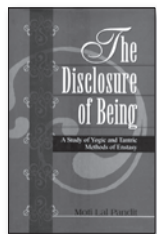
A review like this can hardly do justice to the quality of thought expressed in the book. Though one can always argue for and against, Dr Ramachandran's convictions, by and large, are so well argued that they disarm the tendency to debate—though there are, to be sure, explosively debatable observations. No wonder that the crest jewel of the exposition of

Vedanta in our times, Swami Ranganathananda—his own three-volume commentary on the Gita is a classic—commends Dr Ramachandran's study, saying, 'My heart is with you in your attempt to work for the cause of freedom and equality in Indian society.'

In short, here is a study which is provocative without being polemical, the work of a medical doctor who is also a social activist in the true Gita-spirit. The author suggests that 'if there is a new edition of Bhagavad Gītā in the new millennium, there is no reason to retain *cāturvarṇyam* in it'. May I suggest that he take up this work himself, as a sequel to the present study.

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The Disclosure of Being

Moti Lal Pandit

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54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055.
2006. xxxii + 347. Rs 650.

Indian spirituality has become synonymous with yoga, which is immensely popular today, while the tantras have acquired an esoteric hue. The focus of all streams of Indian thought has been on the transcendence of human limitations through various practices that purify the individual through liberation from psycho-physical desires. Yogic asceticism was never new to the Indians. The ancient Upanishads speak repeatedly of tapas. The control of breath as a means to dhyana is also an ancient practice. The excavations at Harappa have brought out seals which are supposed to depict deities in yogic postures. The Upanishads centre on the metaphysical urge to know 'thyself' and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* prescribes methods for introversion of consciousness.

Moti Lal Pandit divides the yogic schools into two: brahminical or orthodox and non-brahminical or schools with a tantric ethos, the latter having emerged from the fringes of orthodoxy. The early sources of yoga, the goal of yoga, the basic themes of yoga, the problem of suffering and rebirth, similarities between the eightfold path of the Buddha and of yoga, and related topics are discussed in detail in the two introductory chapters. A delineation of the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali follows. The author also makes a comparative study of yoga and the Bhagavadgita. Ecstasy or samadhi, soteriological meaning, and the socio-economic circumstances that give rise to a reli-

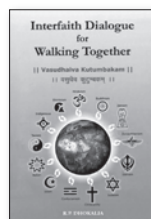
gious ideology are some of the less familiar concepts discussed in the book. Hatha yoga and culture of the body are also dealt with in a separate chapter. References to the Upanishads, *Vedānta Sūtra*, *Sāṅkhya Kārikā*, the Mahabharata, and other texts enrich the copious notes accompanying each chapter.

The author does not subscribe to the view that the tantras originally came from outside India—brought by the Magi priests of the Scythians or learnt by sage Vasishtha from Mongolia. The Mother Goddess concept, which is central to the tantras, he argues, is derived from the prehistoric concept of Earth as Mother. Tantricism is a mode of religious consciousness, characterized by religious practices that have a direct link with the mythic consciousness of humanity. It is experimental rather than faith-oriented. Although its practices seem to be bizarre and outlandish, non-dualistic philosophy is basic to the tantras. The author brings to bear his remarkable erudition on the tantric texts to explain abstruse topics in a logical manner and clear misconceptions through lucid explanations.

This is a masterly book that covers the entire gamut of Indian philosophy in general and the theory and practice of yoga and tantra in particular. In sum, a lucid exposition of some of the most controversial aspects of Indian thought. A cheaper edition would be welcomed by the student community.

Swami Atmajnananda

Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



Interfaith Dialogue for Walking Together

R P Dhokalia

Icon Publications, 4331/3 Ansari Road,
Darya Ganj, New Delhi 110 002. E-mail:
iconpub@eth.net. 2007. xxxiv + 218 pp.
Rs 595.

Though interfaith dialogue is now widely recognized as an essential aspect of religious living, continuing religious exclusivism, dogmatism, fanaticism, and violence grounded in religious ideologies belies our understanding of religious pluralism. This book by an eminent jurist and social thinker invites us to review some of the fundamental issues underlying the meaning and purpose of religion in the context of religious diversity. It tells us why we need to walk together in our search for truth and the purpose of human life, viewing religion as a science of spirituality in which we all need to be educated.

PB

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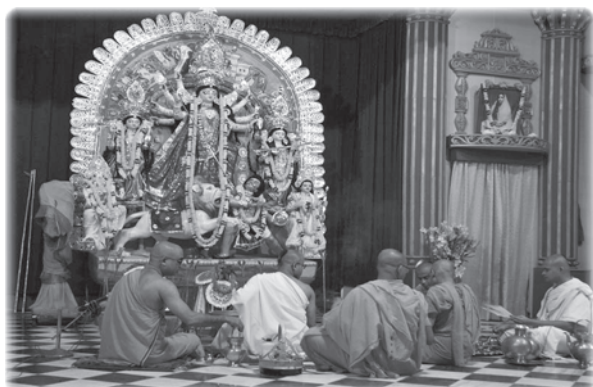
Monks' Conference

The triennial Monks' Conference of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math from 23 to 25 October 2008. In all, 585 monks attended the conference. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the first and last sessions and Srimat Swami Smaranandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, over the other four sessions.

Durga Puja

Durga Puja was celebrated at Belur Math from 6 to 9 October with all solemnity. Thousands of devotees thronged the Belur Math grounds to witness the Puja and to receive the blessings of the Divine Mother. The Kumari Puja performed on 7 October drew huge crowds, and the Sandhi Puja in the early hours of 8 October was also attended by many devotees. Kolkata Doordarshan telecast live the Puja at different times on all the days. The Belur Math website (www.belurmath.org) carries a write-up, photo-galleries, and video-clippings on the celebration. Cooked prasad was served to about 90,000 devotees during the four days, and on Ashtami day the number was more than 42,000. The following 24

Durga Puja 2008 at Belur Math



A session of Monks' Conference 2008 at Belur Math

centres also performed Durga Puja in consecrated images: Antpur, Asansol, Barasat, Contai, Cooch Behar, Dhaleswar (Agartala), Ghatshila, Guwahati, Jalpaiguri, Jamshehpur, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Karimganj, Lucknow, Malda, Medinipur, Mumbai, Patna, Port Blair, Rahara, Shella (Cherrapunji), Shillong, Silchar, and Varanasi Advaita Ashrama.

News from Branch Centres

On 21 September **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, inaugurated its Vivekananda Eye Care Centre.

Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar, organized a workshop on health awareness and blood donation in connection with the national blood donation day on 2 October. Sri Tapan Chakraborty, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Tripura, inaugurated the workshop and Sri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of Tripura, attended the programme as chief guest. The workshop was followed by a blood donation camp in which 60 persons, including the chief minister, donated blood.

On 13 October, the government of Delhi state organized a workshop for NGOs and others under the Revised National TB Control Programme, in which Dr Yoganand Shastri, Minister of Health, Delhi State, presented a memento to **Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi**, in honour of its outstanding service in the area of TB control.

Achievements

Science Olympiad Foundation, New Delhi, awarded the school of **Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar**,

the Best Principal Award for the academic year 2007–08. Besides, Sri Jayanta Chanda, a teacher of the school, was awarded the National Award to Teachers for 2007 on 5 September, Teachers' Day, by Smt. Pratibha D Patil, President of India, at a function held at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. The award carried a silver medal, a certificate of appreciation, and 25,000 rupees.

Abhinab Roy Chowdhury, a class-9 student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia**, secured the first position at the state (West Bengal) level science seminar on 'Water Crisis: Problems and Remedies', held on 30 August at the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum (BITM), Kolkata.

Vikram Aditya, a class-9 student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**,

stood first in the Jharkhand state science seminar on the same theme organized by BITM, Kolkata, on 15 and 16 September at Ranchi. He was awarded a cash prize of Rs 50,000; half of it he donated to the flood relief work in Bihar undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission. In October Vikram Aditya won the

Champions Trophy for the year 2008 at the national science seminar on the same topic, organized jointly by the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) and BITM. On this occasion he received a cash award of Rs 24,000 from the NCSM and Rs 10,000 from the University of Calcutta.

Relief

Flood Relief • The following centres continued their relief operations in flood-affected areas. Details of the materials distributed by them during the month of October follows. In Bihar—**Katihar**: 2,800 kg chira, 1,600 kg sugar, 1,600 packets of biscuits, 800 torches, 900 saris, 600 dhotis and lungis, and 2,040 sets of children's garments to 1,200 families from Madhepura district who had taken shelter in temporary camps at Rupauli town in Purnea district, and to 1,500 families of Pranpur block in Katihar district. **Muzaffarpur**: 18,000 kg rice, 2,000 kg dal, 1,000 kg soya bean, 225 kg sugar, 3,000 kg chana,



90 kg biscuits, 125 l drinking water, 100 steel plates, 100 steel glasses, 3,100 saris, 100 dhotis, 6,000 assorted garments, 72 blankets, 6,100 bags, 100 soap bars, 5,500 candles, 3,200 matchboxes, and 218,500 halogen tablets to 7,500 flood-affected families of 9 villages in Saharsa and Supaul districts. **Patna**: 5,160 saris, 2,580 dhotis, 5,160 blankets, 258,000 halogen tablets, and 2,580 utensil sets (each set containing 5 steel plates, 5 steel mugs, 5 steel spoons, 1 steel ladle, 2 aluminium pots, and other items) to 2,580 flood-affected families of 7 villages in Supaul district. In Gujarat—**Limdi**: 1,500 kg bajra, 1,500 kg rice, 600 kg dal, 600 kg cooking oil, 600 kg sugar, 90 kg tea, and 300 chadars to 300 flood-affected families of Ranagad village near Nal Sarovar in Surendranagar district. In Orissa—**Bhubaneswar**: 5,720 kg chira, 1,480 kg sugar, 5,745 packets of biscuits, 1,430 kg salt, 750 saris, 750 bed-sheets, 500 tarpaulins, 6,670 candles, and 6,120 matchboxes to 1,546 flood-affected families of Cuttack, Khurda, and Puri districts. **Puri Mission**: 8,000 kg chira and 900 kg sugar to 3,000 flood-affected families in Puri district.



Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy persons. **Agartala**: 450 saris, 125 dhotis, and 450 children's garments; **Belgharia**: 90 saris, 41 shirts, 15 pants, 50 blankets, and 120 utensils to 170 families of Barrackpore and Joypur blocks in North 24 Parganas and Bankura districts; **Garbeta**: 500 kg rice, 300 kg flour, 90 kg cooking oil, 100 kg salt, 35 saris, 28 dhotis, and 15 vests to 400 families; **Jalpaiguri**: 400 saris; **Karimganj**: 458 saris and 136 dhotis; **Ulsoor**: 10 kg rice, 10 kg ragi / 5 kg flour, 5 kg dal, and 2 l oil each to 521 families in 22 villages.



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

Volume 113 • January – December 2008

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